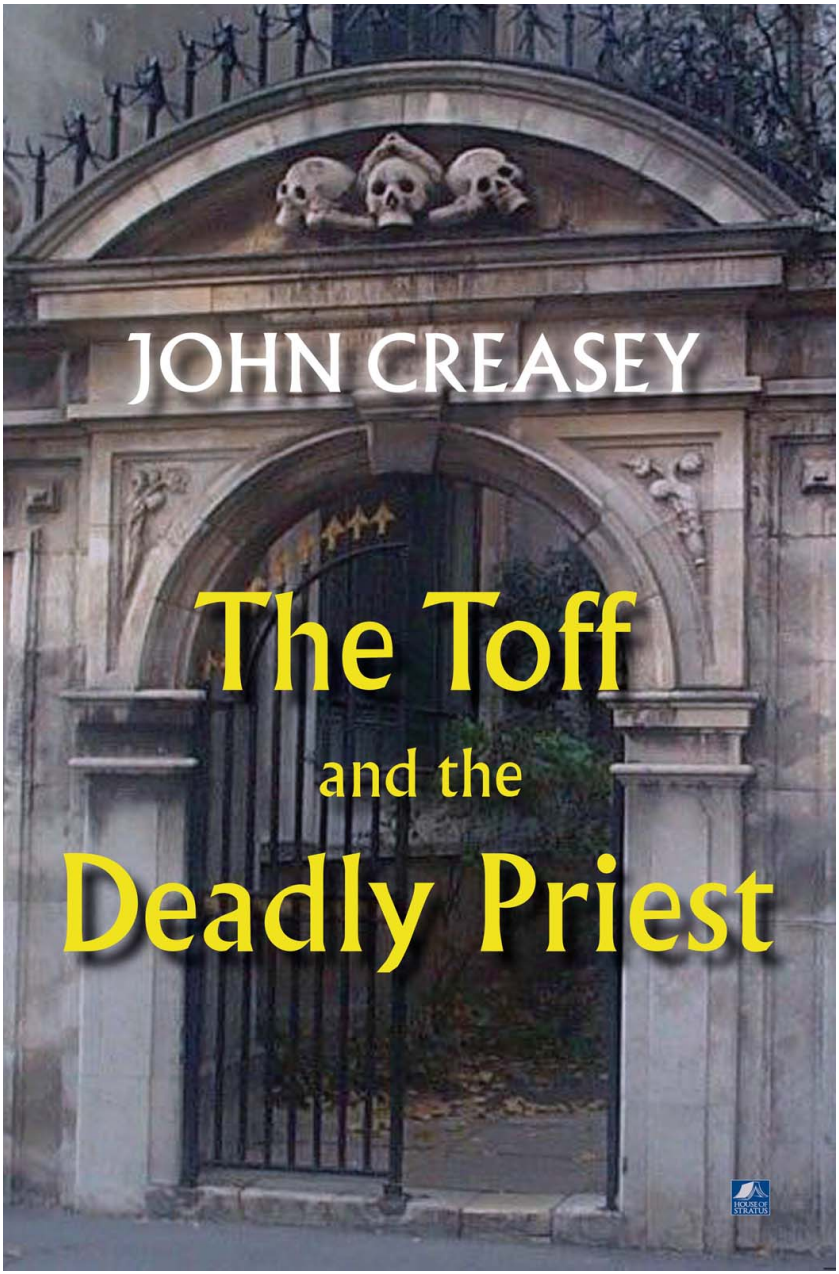
JOHN CREASEY
The Toff
and the
Deadly Priest
HOUSE OF STRATUS

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The Toff and The Deadly Priest

First published in 1944
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This edition published in 2012 by House of Stratus, an imprint of Stratus Books Ltd., Lisandra House, Fore Street, Looe, Cornwall, PL13 1AD, UK.

Typeset by House of Stratus.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library and the Library of Congress.

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About the Author

John Creasey – Master Storyteller - was born in Surrey, England in 1908 into a poor family in which there were nine children, John Creasey grew up to be a true master story teller and international sensation. His more than 600 crime, mystery and thriller titles have now sold 80 million copies in 25 languages. These include many popular series such as *Gideon of Scotland Yard, The Toff, Dr Palfrey and The Baron*.

Creasy wrote under many pseudonyms, explaining that booksellers had complained he totally dominated the 'C' section in stores. They included:

> *Gordon Ashe, M E Cooke, Norman Deane, Robert Caine Frazer, Patrick Gill, Michael Halliday, Charles Hogarth, Brian Hope, Colin Hughes, Kyle Hunt, Abel Mann, Peter Manton, J J Marric, Richard Martin, Rodney Mattheson, Anthony Morton and Jeremy York.*

Never one to sit still, Creasey had a strong social conscience, and stood for Parliament several times, along with founding the *One Party Alliance* which promoted the idea of government by a coalition of the best minds from across the political spectrum.

He also founded the *British Crime Writers' Association*, which to this day celebrates outstanding crime writing. *The Mystery Writers of America* bestowed upon him the *Edgar Award* for best novel and then in 1969 the ultimate *Grand Master Award*. John Creasey's stories are as compelling today as ever.

CHAPTER ONE

The Curate Makes A Call

Jolly brought the caller's card into the bathroom, where Rollison was brushing his teeth. Nothing in Jolly's expression gave a clue to his thoughts, although he would have been justified in thinking that 11.15 pm was an unreasonable time for a stranger to pay an unexpected visit, even on a summer night.

Rollison glanced down, and read:

The Rev. Ronald Kemp.
Curate
St. Guy's Church, Whitechapel.

and then looked up into Jolly's eyes.

"Why?" he asked.

"Mr. Kemp would not explain the reason for his call, sir," said Jolly. "He insisted that he is prepared to wait all night to see you, if needs be."

The manservant looked as if he were fighting a losing battle with dyspepsia. His appearance often gave rise to the baseless accusation that the Toff – by which soubriquet the Hon. Richard Rollison was widely known – had dubbed his man Jolly, inspired by some whimsical fancy to give him a cheerful name to offset his gloomy expression.

"Is that all?" asked Rollison.

"If you are asking me to give you my impressions of Mr. Kemp," said Jolly, cautiously, "I would say that he is in a state of great agitation. He is a large young man, sir."

"We don't know him, do we?" asked Rollison.

"I haven't met him before," said Jolly, "but when I was in the district a few weeks ago, I understood that a new curate had arrived at St Guy's. You may recall that the vicar, the Reverend Cartwright, is seriously ill, and that the curacy has been vacant for some time."

"Yes," said Rollison. "Kemp has certainly taken on a handful."

"He looks as though he is beginning to realise it," said Jolly.

Rollison smiled drily, but he was interested, and sent Jolly to tell the Rev. Kemp that he would see him soon.

He wore a silk dressing gown of duck-egg blue and maroon-coloured pyjamas and slippers; gifts from aunts. The sash about his waist emphasised his tall leanness, and the pale blue threw his dark hair and tanned face into relief. He started brushing his teeth again, needing a few minutes to refresh his memory about the parish of St. Guy. It was not a parish in which the Church was likely to thrive, although there were several mission houses and the Salvation Army Hostel had a large, if changing, list of clients. It was

poor, even in these days when the workers were receiving more money than they had for a long time past, and ‘dock worker’ was no longer synonymous with occasional work and long periods of enforced idleness. Its inhabitants, hardy, hard-swearing Cockneys with a sprinkling of Indians, Pakistanis, Chinamen, Jamaicans, Irish and various others, had taken the air raid blows sturdily, and aroused the admiration of the rest of the country.

The Vicar of St. Guy’s was more than an estimable man; he was godly. His physical courage and endurance had been an inspiration to his neighbours, who could by no stretch of the imagination be called his flock. Yet St. Guy’s, being one of the few churches remaining in the district, had a fair membership. Until Cartwright had worked himself to exhaustion, it had been a considerable power for good.

Rollison, being so fond of the East End and its people, greatly regretted Cartwright’s illness. Now, it seemed, a youthful cleric had descended upon the parish and was in trouble; few people came to the Toff unless they wanted help.

He went into the small drawing room of the Gresham Terrace flat.

The Rev. Ronald Kemp jumped to his feet, and Rollison saw that Jolly had not exaggerated when he had called him massive. Kemp towered above the Toff, who was over six feet. He was a fair-haired, rugged-looking man, clad in a well-cut suit of pin-striped flannel and wearing a limp-looking clerical collar. Rollison judged him to be no more than twenty-three or four.

“Thanks for seeing me,” said Kemp in a powerful voice. “You’re my last hope, Mr. Rollison. *Will* you help me?”

“I might,” said Rollison, cautiously.

“For the love of Mike, don’t put me off with pretty phrases,” boomed the curate. “If you’re not prepared to help, say so.”

His fine, grey eyes, were stormy. He seemed to be fighting to keep a firm hold on himself, and his large hands were clenched. He looked at the Toff as if he were sure that his appeal would be turned down.

“It would be a help if I knew what you want me to do,” Rollison said mildly. “I can’t commit myself in advance.”

“I didn’t think it would be any use,” said Kemp, bitterly. “I never did believe in your reputation.”

“Don’t talk like an ass!” said Rollison, sharply enough to startle Kemp into silence. He offered him a cigarette, and Kemp took one without shifting his gaze. They lit up, and Rollison turned to a corner-cupboard.

“Will you have a drink?”

“No, thanks,” said Kemp, and boomed out again: “It’s really serious, Rollison.” Angrily he watched the Toff pouring out whisky and adding soda water.

“Sure you won’t have one?” he asked.

“Well – yes, I will,” said Kemp. He stood with ill-concealed impatience while Rollison rang for Jolly and asked for ice. Rollison sipped the drink appreciatively, while Kemp swallowed half of his in a gulp, then spoke in a more composed voice.

"I'm sorry I let forth like that, but I'm worried stiff, and I *was* told you were the only man likely to help me."

"Exactly what is the trouble?" asked the Toff.

"One of my church members has been charged with murder," said Kemp, abruptly. "He was arrested a couple of hours ago. I couldn't make any impression on the police, they practically told me to mind my own business."

"Either you met a poor policeman," said Rollison, with a twinkle in his eye, "or else one who didn't like being told what a fool he was!"

Kemp coloured. "Perhaps I was a bit hot headed."

"Who is the accused?" asked Rollison, tactfully.

"A man named Craik," answered Kemp. "He's a damned good fellow, and I don't mind admitting that without him I would have been absolutely lost." He smoothed down his short hair, and went on abruptly: "Craik was mixed up in a fight early this evening. One of the men was killed. He'd been stabbed. The police say that the knife was Craik's."

"Was it?" inquired Rollison.

"I don't know, but if it was, it was stolen."

"It might have been," conceded Rollison. "Do you know what the fight was about?"

"As far as I can gather, there was a lot of foul talk going on, and some of the fellows baited Craik – apparently they didn't approve of me. I know he shouldn't have taken it so badly, but – well, I don't believe that he used a knife."

"So Craik started the fighting," remarked Rollison.

"I don't know about that. He answered them pretty stoutly, as far as I can gather, and before anyone knew where he was, the scuffle started. There are dozens of such brawls every night, and no one would have thought much about it, but for the – er – accident."

Rollison regarded the young parson thoughtfully.

"I'll do what I can," he said, cautiously, "but I must warn you, it's no use calling murder an accident, and no use whitewashing a man because you happen to like him. I don't say you're wrong, but you've got a tough crowd in your parish, and you'll find a streak of violence in unexpected people. Don't get this thing out of perspective. The English law has a curious habit of doing the right thing in the long run, too."

Kemp spoke reluctantly.

"I suppose you're right, but – well, what with one thing and another, I feel pretty sore." Rollison allowed that understatement to pass without comment. "You're serious?" added the curate, more eagerly. "You will try to help?"

"Yes," promised Rollison.

"Good man! I—" Kemp looked embarrassed. "I'm afraid I was extremely rude just now."

"Don't worry about that," said Rollison. "Just what do you mean by 'what with one thing and another'?"

Kemp shrugged his big shoulders.

"Don't get the idea that I'm complaining," he said, "I knew that I was going into a pretty hot district. A friend in my previous church suggested it, and it rather attracted me. My father is an old friend of Mr. Cartwright, too. Since he's been ill, things have rather run to seed. I've been trying to get them going again, but—" He drew a deep breath. *"Can* you see the sense in it?" he demanded helplessly.

"In what precisely?" asked Rollison, patiently.

"Breaking up meetings, pilfering from our reserve of old clothes – it seems as if there's someone in the district who wants to wreck everything we try to do."

"I see," said Rollison, and added unexpectedly: "The Devil works hard, doesn't he?"

Kemp looked startled. "I didn't expect—" He broke off. When he coloured his fair skin was suffused and he looked like a boy.

"You didn't expect that kind of talk from me," Rollison completed for him. "I don't see why not. Crime is evil, evil springs from somewhere, why not add the 'D'? Where are you living?"

"I've converted a room at one of the mission halls," answered Kemp. "Housing's still a problem near the docks, and I thought I'd be wise to try to manage on my own. Will you come with me?" he added, eagerly. "There are one or two people who saw the fight, and you might learn something from them."

"I won't come with you," said Rollison, "but I'll join you in about an hour's time. Which hall is it?"

"In Jupe Street. Oughtn't you to have a guide?"

Rollison chuckled. "I can find my way about! You get back, Kemp, and stop thinking that Craik is halfway to the gallows!"

He ushered the young parson out, and when the door closed turned to see Jolly approaching from his bedroom, where, doubtless, he had been listening.

"I've laid out your clothes, sir," said Jolly. "A flannel suit will be all right, won't it?"

"Yes, thanks. What do you make of him?"

"I think he is in a somewhat chastened mood now, sir, and it should be beneficial," said Jolly. "It is rather an intriguing story, isn't it?"

"Yes. Do you know Craik?"

"I seem to have heard the name," said Jolly. "I think he owns a small general store near St. Guy's."

"We'll know soon," said Rollison. "Try to get Grice on the 'phone, will you? If he's not at the Yard, try his home. Oh – find out first who arrested Craik."

"Very good, sir," said Jolly.

Superintendent Grice of Scotland Yard was neither at the Yard nor at his home – he was away for a few days, on a well-earned holiday. Det. Sergeant Bray of the Yard had detained Craik, and Inspector Chumley – an easy-

going, genial individual from the AZ Division – had charged him.

"A curious mixture," Rollison reflected, "Bray from the Yard doing work in the Division and handing it over to Chumley. Chumley's usually all right, although he's a bit of a smiler. I'll look in and see him after I've been to Jupe Street."

"Will you want me, sir?" inquired Jolly.

"Come, if you feel like it," said Rollison, "but I don't expect much tonight."

They set out together, and were lucky in finding a taxi in Piccadilly, with a driver who put himself at their disposal for the night.

"I 'ope that's long enough, sir," he said out of the darkness. "If it isn't, I'll pay you overtime," promised Rollison, and was rewarded by gusty laughter and the comforting knowledge that he had put the man in a good humour.

Jolly opened the windows to admit a cool, welcome breeze. "I wonder how the bellicose curate is getting on?" said Rollison, *sotto voce.* "Did you or did you not take to him, Jolly?"

"I did rather, sir, yes."

"If you hadn't, you wouldn't have admitted him," said Rollison. "But I doubt whether you could have kept him out. That young man is militant minded and he seems to be getting a raw deal."

"I expect he has invited it," murmured Jolly, primly. "I can't imagine the people near the docks taking kindly to being driven by a parson."

"No. And he would try to drive," mused Rollison. The journey took a little more than half-an-hour. On the last lap, Jolly had to direct the driver to Jupe Street, a narrow thoroughfare leading off Whitechapel Road. The Mission Hall was at the far end. They passed row upon row of mean houses and some bare patches, and did not see any light until the taxi stopped. Then a streak of light from an open door shone right across an alleyway.

"Tell 'em to put that light aht," growled the driver. Rollison and Jolly hurried down the alley to the door, and as they drew nearer, they caught sight of Kemp standing just inside the room.

Jolly stood outside the door as Rollison went in.

Kemp must have heard him, but did not turn round.

He was standing quite still, his chin thrust forward and his face set. He was looking at the wreckage of chairs and forms and benches, curtains and pictures. The hall was not a large one, and at the far end was a stage, with doors on either side; they were open and inside both rooms Rollison saw further upheaval. Whoever had been here had worked with frenzied malice. Most of the chairs were broken, the side walls had been daubed with white and brown paint, and on the wall behind the stage, written in badly formed letters in red paint, were the words:

Clear out, Kemp. We don't want yore kind ere.

CHAPTER TWO

Evidence Of Malice

"Who is that?" asked Kemp, without looking round.

"Rollison," said Rollison.

"Oh." The younger man turned slowly and looked into the Toff's face. His own held a curiously drawn expression – as if the past hour had put years on to his life. "Someone doesn't like me," he said, harshly.

"That can cut both ways," said Rollison, lightly.

He wanted to see how the other would react, and watched him carefully. After a long pause, during which his face was quite blank except for the glitter in his eyes, Kemp's lips began to curve.

"You're a good cure for depression," he said, in a lighter voice. I was to have met two parishioners here. Instead, the door was open and when I switched on the light, this is what I found. They've made a thorough job, haven't they?"

"Not bad," admitted Rollison, "but there isn't much that can't be repaired, as far as I can see, so perhaps they want to keep you busy. Who were the two people whom you expected to be waiting for you?"

"A Mr. and Mrs. Whiting," Kemp said, absently. "Probably they got scared, and I can't blame them. I shouldn't imagine I'm going to have many friends in the near future!" The edge was back in his voice, as he proffered cigarettes. Rollison took one.

"You don't know your people yet," he said. "Those who were lukewarm towards you before will now rally round, and people who've never set foot in the church will probably come in on your side. You've a chance in a thousand, if you'll take it."

Kemp looked at him incredulously.

"Are you serious?"

"Yes," said Rollison, "I've been acquainted with these people for years, and I don't think you need worry about lacking friends – you can count on it that those who aren't for you now, are against you, which will be a help." He stepped to the door and called Jolly, who entered without a change of expression; he bowed to Kemp. "Move around a bit, Jolly," said Rollison, "and try to find out something about this. Freddie Day might have heard a whisper, or else—"

"I think I know whom to approach, sir," said Jolly, faintly reproachful.

Rollison grinned. "So you should! If I'm not here when you've finished, I'll leave a message."

"Very good, sir." Jolly went out, and Kemp's gaze followed him, as if he were too good to be true.

"Who is Eddy Day?" he asked.

"Freddie," corrected Rollison. "He's the manager of the pub on the corner

of Jupe Street."

Kemp frowned. "I don't know the licensed victuallers."

Rollison stared. "The—" he chuckled, and went on jocularly: "If you call pub-keepers licensed victuallers, you'll make your people think they've got to learn a new language – it would be easier for you to learn theirs!" When Kemp looked slightly shocked, he went on in a sharper voice: "The pubs are part of your parish, aren't they?"

"Yes," admitted Kemp, uncomfortably, "but I – I – I always thought—"

"That they were dens of vice and iniquity in the East End," said Rollison. "Yes, I suppose you would, but the quicker you get the idea out of your head the better. You'll find the good as well as the bad go regularly for their pint, and if you try to make 'em give it up, you'll come a cropper. None of which is my business, strictly speaking," he added, more lightly. "This job is. Have you got anything in mind?"

"I suppose I'd better tell the police," said Kemp, slowly.

"Why such reluctance?"

"I didn't get on with them very well before," said Kemp. "I mean, about Craik."

"If that were the only reason, I'd say go to see them," said Rollison. "But it might be a good idea not to tell them yet. They'll hear about it, but unless you approach them officially, they'll do nothing. If you ask them to investigate, they'll probably start a round-up, and they might pick up half-a-dozen of the people concerned, but your stock would go down with a bump."

"I wish I could understand you," said Kemp, after a short pause.

"Taken by and large," said Rollison, "East Enders don't like the police. Oh, they rub shoulders and get along all right, but it's an uneasy peace. A man who runs to the police if he's been beaten up or had his pocket picked, doesn't win much favour, but if he finds out who does it and repays him in kind, that's a different story."

"Confound it! I can't go round wrecking people's homes!"

"Need you take me so literally?" asked Rollison. "Ever done any boxing, Kemp?"

"A bit, at Oxford," Kemp answered.

"I thought you looked as if you could pack a punch."

"I suppose you do realise that I'm—"

"A parson, yes. Is that any reason why you shouldn't behave like a human being?" asked Rollison. "You want to get on top of this trouble, and you want the people friendly, don't you?"

Kemp said: "Yes." He spoke with restraint, as if he had difficulty in preventing himself from saying just how badly he wanted both those things.

"Then give my way a trial," advised Rollison. "You'll soon find out if it flops." He stepped forward towards the stage and looked at the writing thoughtfully, murmuring: "A nice taste in capitals. Now, let's get busy," he said more briskly. "It's personal, but it isn't aimed at you because you're Ronald Kemp, recently from Oxford, and trying to muscle in on a new

district. It's because of something you've done, or you want to do, which is upsetting someone's applecart. Have you any ideas about it?"

"Not the faintest!"

"Try to think some up," urged Rollison. "Go over everything that's happened since you arrived and find out whose corns you've trodden on. What kind of reforms have you tried to start?" he added drily. "You haven't seriously had a shot at turning the pagans teetotal, have you?"

"Great Scott, no! I don't know that I've done anything that could offend anyone," Kemp went on worriedly. "I've started one or two of the mission halls going again; there hadn't been any meetings or social evenings for some time. And I've tried to step up the collection of old clothes for some of the poorer people. Do you think they resent that kind of charity?"

"They'd be queer fish if they liked it," Rollison said. "But they don't resent it, especially if they're clothes for the women and children. Kemp, get one thing firmly fixed in your head. Most of your parishioners have exactly the same ideas of right and wrong as you have, although they differ in degree. They like a fighter, even if they don't like what he fights for. If a man doesn't drink or smoke, that's his affair, but if he tries to convert others to his way of thinking, it's a different matter. That goes for any kind of habit, vice or con – the one way you might get some of them to look at it differently is by example – only by example. Do you see what I'm driving at?"

"Yes," said Kemp, slowly. "As a matter of fact, Mr. Cartwright said something on the same lines, but I haven't been able to see him for several weeks." He looked rueful. "I didn't pay much attention at the time."

"Try to, now," urged Rollison. "What was I saying? Oh – item one: you've upset someone badly, and you're the only one who can find out how. It may be simply a matter of having trodden on someone's corns, but it doesn't look like that to me," he admitted, thoughtfully.

"What does it look like?" asked Kemp.

"A much bigger motive," said Rollison. "But that's guesswork, and won't help us. This Mr. and Mrs. Whiting – where do they live?"

"In Little Lane – it's off Jupe Street."

"I know it," said Rollison. "Let's go and see them."

Kemp obviously did not see much point in them both going, but he raised no serious objection and, after closing the door, the lock of which had been broken by the wreckers, they walked through the blackout towards Little Lane.

They had not gone fifty yards before Rollison knew that they were being followed.

He said nothing to Kemp until they reached the corner, and then spoke in a whisper.

"Walk straight on, and make as much noise as you can. Don't argue!"

He heard Kemp's intake of breath as the man was about to speak, but obediently the curate crossed the end of the lane and stamped towards Whitechapel Road. Rollison slipped back into the lane, and after a few

seconds, two men passed; they made little sound and the soft padding of their footsteps told him that they were wearing rubber-soled shoes.

He wished that he was, too.

He moved after them, drawing closer. It was too dark for him to see Kemp, but he could just make out the figures of the others. Both were short men who moved easily and silently.

Kemp's footsteps rang out clearly, and the two short men quickened their pace.

Rollison followed suit, caring less now about being heard, but the others appeared too intent on their task to keep on the alert for anyone else.

Rollison suddenly shone his torch full on the two men, who were within a few feet of Kemp. One of them had an arm upraised, and was holding a cosh.

"Look out, Kemp!" cried Rollison.

He broke into a run as Kemp swung round; the cosh appeared to strike him on the shoulder, but with nothing like the power with which he struck at his assailant. The man toppled over before his companion swung round, to get away – only to run straight into Rollison.

He tried to dodge aside; Rollison put out a leg and tripped him up.

"Are you all right?" he called to Kemp.

After a pause, Kemp called back in a strained voice. "Rollison, I think I've hurt him."

"Even if you've broken his neck, it wouldn't rate as manslaughter! Is he unconscious?"

The man he had tripped up was foxing as he lay motionless on the floor, and he kept the beam of light on him.

"Yes," called Kemp.

"Make sure, then pick him up and take him back to the hall," said Rollison. "I – ah!"

His own victim sprang to his feet like a spring-heeled-Jack and made to dart down the street, but Rollison shot out a hand and caught his coat, yanking him back. He fended off an attempt to kick him in the stomach, got a grip on the man's arm and held it behind his back in a hammer-lock. The man began to squeal.

"The more you wriggle, the more it will hurt," Rollison said quietly.

No one appeared to have heard the scuffle, and the only sounds were their voices and Kemp's footsteps. Kemp came up, carrying a man in his arms, and Rollison spoke mildly.

"I don't like ribbing you all the time, old chap, but if he comes round he could get his hands on your throat, or gouge your eyes out, or knee you in the stomach. Put him over your shoulder in a fireman's hold, and keep a grip on one of his wrists. That's better!" Although he could not see clearly in the light of the torch, he approved the speed with which Kemp took his advice. Together, they went to the hall. The squealing of the Toff's captive grew louder. Still no one appeared to hear them, and they entered the hall without having encountered a soul.

Kemp lowered his victim to a broken bench.

"Surely someone heard us?" he said.

Rollison chuckled.

"Half Jupe Street heard us, but it wasn't their business. We haven't done so badly, have we?"

"Did you expect this?"

"I wasn't altogether surprised," admitted Rollison, "but I didn't hope for a brace of them. Nasty looking brutes, aren't they? Have you ever seen either of them before?"

"No," said Kemp.

Looped round the right wrist of his victim, who was still unconscious but not badly hurt, was a cosh – a weapon not unlike a rubber truncheon, but smooth and round at one end and narrow near the wrist. He pulled it off; it was flexible and he swished it through the air, letting it go perilously close to the man who was cowering back against the wall. The weapon missed his head by inches.

"No!" he gasped. "No!"

"Sorry," said Rollison, perfunctorily. "Do you know this weapon, Kemp?"

"No," said Kemp again.

"It's a common-or-garden cosh," Rollison told him, "and it's as popular here as the knuckleduster, razor and flick-knife, but less dangerous. Feel it." Kemp fingered the thicker end. "It's filled with lead shot," went on Rollison, "and is made like that so that it will knock a man out but leave no permanent injury, probably not even a bruise. So they didn't intend to kill, which should console you." He smiled crookedly at Kemp, but before the curate could reply, he swung round on the conscious man and spoke in a rough voice. "Now! It's time you talked, who sent you after Mr. Kemp?"

CHAPTER THREE

Talk Of Harry Keller

The man's mouth dropped open and he tried to back further against the wall, but only succeeded in knocking the back of his head against it. The Toff moved the cosh again, not violently, but close to his frightened eyes. The man was undersized, round-faced, with a broken nose and an ugly scar over his right eye. From his cauliflower ears the Toff classed him as an ex-prize fighter. He was a man of perhaps forty, and in spite of his fear, there was a cunning glint in his eyes.

He drew in a hiss of breath.

"I – I just 'appened to b—"

"You just happened to meet a friend and you were walking along with him when all of a sudden he jumped out at someone in front of him," said Rollison, sarcastically. "I know all about that one, I've heard it before. I'd followed you far enough to know that you were both involved, so don't lie. Who told you to. . ."

"I dunno!" squealed the man.

"You dunno, don't you," said Rollison. "Kemp, I'm going to give you a lesson in how to make a stubborn man talk. You might find it useful, but don't say who taught you!" He raised the cosh as if he meant business, and Kemp actually put out a hand to restrain him.

"I'll tell you!" gasped the little man, rearing up against the wall, "'Arry Keller gimme a quid to come along wiv Spike!"

Rollison glanced at the man on the floor.

"And is he Spike?"

"Spike Adams, that's his name, mister."

"And what's your name?" demanded Rollison.

"I – I don't 'ave to tell yer *my* name, do I?" asked the little man, in a wheedling tone, "I've told yer the names of the others. Gimme a break. I never did nothing, I only drifted along with Spike, that's all."

"When you've given me your name and waited for half an hour, you can go," said Rollison.

"You *mean* that?" The man's little eyes lit up.

"Yes," said Rollison – and released a flood of talk.

"My name's 'Arris, mister, Tom 'Arris. I live dahn in River Row, everyone knows Tom Arris – me name's an 'ouseold word. Never beaten, I wasn't. Had two hundred and two fights an' never beaten, that's me. I'm dahn on me luck, mister," went on Harris in maudlin tones. "I wouldn't have done such a thing as I done tonight if I 'adn't been. A quid means a lot to me, an' I never knew what Spike was going to do. That's Gawd's truth."

"I don't think!" said Rollison. "Go and sit on the stage, and don't move until I tell you to."

“Me wife’ll be expecting me,” declared Harris, pleadingly, “I promised I wouldn’t be no later than one o’clock. You wouldn’t let a woman be left alone at night these days, would you?”

“Some women, gladly,” said Rollison. “Get on the stage.”

Harris shrugged his shoulders, and slouched off.

“Keep an eye on him,” Rollison said, *sotto voce,* “he might start throwing the chairs about.”

He spoke loudly enough for the man on the floor to hear, if he were conscious, and stepped towards the other wall. The man bounded to his feet and darted for the door. Rollison picked up a chair and threw it so that the man went sprawling.

“Now, Spike,” said Rollison, chidingly. “Foxing won’t help you.” He strolled over to the man, who made no further attempt to get up, and smiled at him. “So Harry Keller sent you, did he?”

Adams glared up.

“So you’re not a talker, like Harris?” said Rollison, “I suppose I couldn’t expect to find two on the same night.” He glanced at Kemp, who was trying to watch him and keep an eye on Harris at the same time. “I don’t think we need worry about this customer, do you? The police will look after him; he’ll probably get twelve months for using the cosh.”

Adams broke across the words.

“If you run me in, I’ll see you get beaten up. Got me?”

“It’s like that, is it?” asked Rollison, thrusting a hand into his pocket and swinging the cosh with the other. “I don’t think you’ve recognised me, Spike.”

“I don’t give a damn who you are!”

“You should, you know,” said Rollison. “For now I come to think of it, I’ve seen and heard a lot about you. Try using your memory.” When Adams kept silent, he went on in an amiable tone: “Come! You should be able to do better than this!”

A remarkable change came over Spike Adams’s face. One moment he was glaring defiance; the next he was staring incredulously and defiance seemed to ooze away from him. His body relaxed and his lips began to move, but he only managed to stutter. Rollison stood smiling down at him. Kemp gave up all pretence of watching the man on the stage.

“Gawd!” exclaimed Spike, at last. “You’re the Toff!”

“That’s right, Spike.”

“*You – you* ain’t in this affair.”

“Didn’t Harry Keller tell you I was,” asked Rollison. “He should be fair, shouldn’t he?” His voice changed. “Let’s have it: what do you know?”

Spike began to talk freely.

“I dunno much, mister, that’s a fact. Keller gimme the orders, said I was to beat the parson up. That’s all. He never said I might run inter the Toff. Listen, mister, you wouldn’t run me in, would you? I ’ad to do it. If I hadn’t, Keller would’ve put some of the boys on me.”

“Which boys?” asked Rollison.

"He's got a dozen in his mob!"

"Harry Keller and his dozen, is it?" mused Rollison. "Where can I find Keller?"

"I – I dunno," said Spike, and his voice became a squeak. "I don't, I tell yer – that's Gawd's truth. He's not one who stays in the same place for long. Last I heard, he was at the Docker, but he ain't there now. I seed 'im in the street ter-night, that's when he gimme the job."

Rollison weighed the cosh in his hand, and deliberated. Harris was staring fixedly from the stage; the name 'Toff' had affected him as much as it had Spike Adams. Only the heavy breathing of the prisoners broke the silence.

Kemp looked from one to the other, incredulous.

"All right," Rollison said at last. "I'll take your word this time, but if you've lied to me, I'll fix you. Don't forget it. The police will be glad of a chance to put both of you inside," he went on, turning to include Harris in his homily. "If Keller wants you to do any more of his dirty work, send word to me."

"Okay, mister!" Spike gasped.

He scrambled to his feet, and Harris jumped down from the stage and joined him. Rollison nodded towards the door, and the men nearly fell over each other in their eagerness to get away. Harris closed the door carefully behind them.

Kemp drew a deep breath.

"Great Scott, Rollison! I've never seen anything like it!"

Rollison smiled. "I hope you often will. They know we could land them in jail for a year, and added to it they have a curious idea that I'm unbeatable and infallible."

"But that man's face, when he recognised you!"

Rollison laughed.

"Once upon a time someone started a legend about me, and I've kept up the illusion ever since," he said, lightly. "We're making progress. We want to interview Mr. Harry Keller as soon as we can. A curious business," he added. "I think Adams told the truth when he said he doesn't know where Keller lives, and that he's not one of the mob. So Keller wanted to make quite sure that if things went wrong, no one could say much about what he's up to."

"Can you see any sense in it?" demanded Kemp.

"There is sense, but no reason for it," said Rollison. "Who first suggested that I might help?"

"The Whitings," said Kemp.

"We really ought to go to see them," said Rollison, glancing at his watch. "It's half-past one, but—"

"We can't knock them up at this time of night!"

"That won't worry them," said Rollison, confidently.

"Look here!" said Kemp. "Never mind the Whitings – why did you let those men go?"

"Is that still worrying you?" asked Rollison. "They'll run straight to Keller and tell him about me," said Rollison. "It's one thing to persecute a

newcomer to the district – and there's a peculiar idea that curates can't hit back, but Spike knows better now! – and another thing to operate against me. I know the East End and I've a lot of friends here. It will be interesting to see what happens when Keller gets to know I'm involved."

"I give up!" exclaimed Kemp.

"Not you, you've only just started! Let's see the Whitings." Kemp protested half-heartedly, but Rollison was firm. This time, no one followed them from the hall. The stars were still out, and a breeze from the river made it cooler. Rollison walked leisurely, and Kemp towered beside him, occasionally starting to speak but always thinking better of it. They were halfway down Little Lane, shining their torches on the numbers of the houses, when Kemp said abruptly: "I say, what about your man?"

"He'll be all right."

"But you were going to leave a message for him!"

"He won't be finished for another hour or more," said Rollison. "If he should get back and find us gone, he'll telephone my flat. Don't worry about Jolly. What was the Whitings' number?"

"Forty-nine," Kemp told him.

"Forty-three-five-seven-nine," said Rollison. "Here we are."

The house was one of a long, narrow terrace which, in daylight, looked dreary and dilapidated. There were no pavements in Little Lane, and the road was cobbled. An odour of decay and stale cooking hung about the lane, but there was no chink of light from any window, no sign of anyone awake.

Rollison knocked sharply on the door.

"I hope they don't think it's an awful nerve," said Kemp. "I hope you think Craik's worth the trouble," said Rollison, tartly.

"Oh – sorry!" Kemp made no further comment, and Rollison knocked again, but there was no answer.

"Do they live here on their own?" asked Rollison.

"There's an old lady – Mrs. Whiting's mother – and three children," said Kemp.

"No boarders?"

"I've never heard of any."

Rollison knocked again. The sound echoed along the street and faded into a brooding silence, but brought no response. Rollison rattled the letter box, bent down and peered inside. A faint glow of light showed at the far end of the passage.

"That's peculiar," he said. "Stay here, Kemp – don't go away, and don't let anyone distract your attention."

"Where—" began Kemp, but he spoke to the darkness, for Rollison had disappeared, soundlessly.

Rollison hurried to the end of the lane, then along Jupe Street to a narrow alley. There were tiny gardens here, back and front, for Jupe Street had been built when some measure of enlightenment had permeated Victorian minds, and even East Enders had been allowed room in which to breathe.

There was no gateway to the alley.

Rollison counted the wooden gates as he passed, shining his torch until he reached Number 49. He put it out, and opened a gate noisily. He left it open, and walked with heavy tread for a few yards, then switched off his torch and went on again stealthily, counting the houses by their roofs outlined against the star-lit sky. He stopped at Number 47.

He thought he heard voices.

The back gate was open, and he heard a man stirring – as if he were waiting inside the tiny yard, and getting impatient. Soon, a door opened and a sliver of light showed. It disappeared as the door closed.

"Okay?" a man asked, softly.

"I've scared the lights out of them," said another, in a cultured voice which carried a hint of laughter. "They won't go to church in a hurry!"

Rollison stood in the doorway as the men approached, holding his torch in front of him. As they drew within a yard or two of him, walking side by side, he switched on the torch, and the dazzling light brought them abruptly to a standstill.

"And which of you is Mr. Keller?" inquired Rollison, politely.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Men Who Uttered Menaces

"Don't make the mistake of moving," continued Rollison, without a pause, "because I've brought a gun with me. Which of you is Keller?" he repeated.

Neither of them moved. Probably they realised that if they doubled back into the house, they would do little good; more likely, they were afraid that he really had a gun. The light of his torch showed their hands as well as their faces.

The taller of the two was well-dressed and good-looking with short, dark hair and a heavy moustache. He was hatless, and wore an open-necked shirt. Obviously he was the man with the cultured voice. The other, shorter and thick-set, had a pugnacious but not an evil face – he was very different from the ex-prize-fighter and Spike Adams. His large eyes stood the light better than his companion, and he was the first to speak.

"who the hell are you?" His voice was rough but not Cockney.

"A friend of Kemp," answered Rollison.

"If you know what's good for you, you'll tell Kemp to clear out," growled the thick-set man. "He's not wanted here."

"So I gathered when Spike Adams tried to beat him up," said Rollison. "The Rev. Kemp is tougher than you realise."

"I've warned him," the man growled.

"Are you Keller?"

"Never mind who I am!"

"I don't think we understand each other," said Rollison, mildly. "I'm helping Kemp, who is here to stay. Anyone who tries to get rid of him will run into much more trouble than he expects."

"Anyone who helps Kemp will be lucky if he doesn't get his neck broken," said the thick-set man.

Then, with one accord, they jumped at him.

Rollison was prepared for the rush. He switched off his torch, stepped to one side, and shot out his foot. The simple method worked. The thick-set man fell heavily, and the other tripped over him, gasping. Rollison drew away, not certain that the worst was over. The night's silence was broken by the sound of footsteps approaching from both directions.

He slipped into the yard of the house next door, and stood by the gate. The men on the ground picked themselves up, muttering, as a newcomer drew up.

"You okay?" he asked, hoarsely.

"Yes," grunted the thick-set man. "If I come across that man again, I'll break his neck!" He uttered a stream of expletives as he dusted himself down, while Rollison backed further into the yard, and other men arrived.

None of the newcomers saw him. He kept close to the wall, trying to

estimate the chances of climbing into the next yard if they should start to search for him. In the darkness, climbing would not be easy, but there were at least three newcomers, and odds of five to one were too heavy.

He crept further away, although he could hear their heavy breathing. There was a furtive air about them all, and they spoke in whispers.

"Who was he?" asked the man with the cultured voice.

"Some fool who fancies himself," muttered the other. "I didn't think Kemp would ask any of his posh friends to come and help him. We'll have to put a stop to that."

"I never see no one," one of the newcomers said.

"I think I seed him go Jupe Street way," volunteered another.

"He's scared stiff," said the man with the gruff voice. "Let's get away."

"Oughtn't we to look for him?" asked the man with the cultured voice.

"On a night like this? Have some sense!"

They moved off, two of the newcomers going ahead of the couple whom Rollison had met and the third following. Rollison waited until their footsteps had faded, then pushed a hand through his hair, looking very thoughtful as he walked to the back door of the Whitings' house, and tapped.

After a long pause, the door opened. A faint glow of light shone from another room. A thin man was outlined against it, but Rollison could not see his face.

"W – what do you want?" His voice was unsteady.

"If you're Mr. Whiting, I want to see you," said Rollison. He pushed his way past and closed the door. He heard the hissing and popping of a lighted gas jet, and widened the doorway from which the light came. It shone on a weedy looking young man with thin hair, pale features, a harassed expression.

"Who – who is it, Erny?" asked a woman from another room, in a quavering voice. "Ar – are they back again?"

"I don't know," muttered Erny Whiting. "I – No! They're not!" His voice rose and his troubled expression cleared. "Why, it's the—"

"Hush!" urged Rollison.

Whiting stood and gazed at him in silence, while a little anxious – and tired looking – woman came from the other room. She stopped abruptly when she saw Rollison, a gleam of recognition in her eyes.

"The others might be listening outside," said Rollison, "I'll make sure. You let Mr. Kemp in – he's at the front."

Mrs. Whiting turned to obey after only a moment's hesitation. Rollison went into the yard again, but found no one. He returned to the house and was ushered into the tiny parlour. Kemp was inside, stooping slightly because the ceiling was so low. In an armchair in one corner sat a very old woman, her hair drawn tightly back from her forehead. Her face was so thin that her skin was a mass of lines and wrinkles. She looked at Rollison with bright, beady eyes – both suspicious and wary.

"Who is he?" she squeaked.

"It – it's Mr. Rollison," said Whiting, nervously. "I – I somehow didn't think you would come, Mr. Rollison."

"We can go on from there," smiled Rollison, leaning against a piano which took up most of one wall. "Why didn't you open the front door as soon as we knocked?"

Whiting licked his lips.

"They – the men told me not to."

"Do you know who they were?"

"No, I've never seen them before," answered Whiting. "They came about ten minutes before you – came the back way." He licked his lips again. "They said we wasn't to help Mr. Kemp, or go to the church – if we did, they said, they'd—" He stopped, tongue-tied.

Rollison's eyes held a steely glint.

"The men who uttered menaces!" he murmured. "Whom did they threaten? Your children?"

"Yes!" Whiting gasped.

"We had to promise we wouldn't help Mr. Kemp!" Mrs. Whiting cried. "We don't want anything to happen to our children, Mr. Rollison!"

"Of course you don't, and nothing will," Rollison assured her. "Why do they want to keep you away from church, Whiting? Do you know?"

"They – they only just told us that," said Whiting, "but I think I know why. I was – I was with Joe Craik," he added, with a nervous rush. "We was walking down to the hall together, and two men bumped into us. They went off, and Joe said they'd picked 'is pocket, but the only thing missing was his knife, he said, and he might have left that at his shop."

"Go on," murmured Rollison.

"Well, we hadn't got much further on when three more were waiting for us, near the hall," Whiting said, sending a troubled glance at the old woman in the corner, who clearly disapproved of his frankness. "They started leading off about Mr. Kemp. It wasn't fair, the things they said – it just wasn't fair. I didn't want any trouble, but Joe answered back, and before we knew where we were, they was on us. We *had* to hit back," Whiting added, defensively. "The police come, and one of them was on the pavement – I thought he'd knocked hisself out. Instead—"

"He warned you, didn't he?" squeaked the old woman in the corner. "He told you wot would 'appen if you squealed!"

"Be quiet, Ma," pleaded Whiting.

"He told you—"

"Hold your tongue, mother!" Mrs. Whiting swung round on the older woman, surprisingly sharp-tongued. "We don't want any nonsense from you! It wasn't right to promise not to see Mr. Kemp. If it hadn't been for you, Erny wouldn't never have promised!"

"If they was *my* children—"

Rollison smiled at the old crone and moved towards her.

"Nothing's going to happen to the children, that's a promise." He surveyed her with his head on one side, compelling her to return his gaze.

After a long pause, her expression relaxed; but her words were grudging.

"If *you* ses so, I suppose that's all right."

"It will be," Rollison assured her, and turned to Whiting. "Have you told the police anything yet?"

"No," said Whiting. "Joe told me to hop it, because we didn't want no more trouble. It wasn't until afterwards that I knew the chap on the ground was dead."

"Don't you have nothing to do with the police!" protested the old woman.

"They'll have to hear the story," Rollison said, "but it might be wise for you not to go into details, Whiting. Leave it to me, will you?"

"I really ought—" Whiting began, and then shrugged. "All right, Mr. Rollison. But what shall I say if they come?"

"Forget all about the first pair you met, and just tell the truth about the fight," answered Rollison. "Kemp, will you stay here for half-an-hour?"

"Yes, of course."

"Keep the doors and windows shut," Rollison said. "As soon as I'm back, everything will be all right."

He knew that Kemp was bursting to ask questions, but the curate showed admirable self-restraint. The old woman's suspicious gaze was on Rollison as he went out of the room. He made sure that no one was about in the lane, then walked towards the corner of the street and along Jupe Street to a telephone kiosk. Before entering, he waited, listening intently, but he heard nothing.

Soon, he was speaking to a man whose voice sounded heavy with sleep and who complained bitterly about being disturbed in the middle of the night. Immediately Rollison gave his name, the sleepiness seemed to vanish and the protests might never have been uttered.

"Why, Mr. Ar, wot a pleasure! I never expected to 'ear from you ter-night, that's a fact. Can I do anyfink for you, Mr. Ar?"

"Yes, Bill," said Rollison, "there's a family named Whiting, living at 49, Little Lane, off Jupe Street. They've three children. I want you to look after them."

"They in trouble?"

"A Mr. Harry Keller doesn't like them," said Rollison.

There was no immediate response.

He needed no more telling that Harry Keller meant something to Bill Ebbutt, who kept a pub in the Mile End Road, and also ran a boxing gymnasium where many of the more promising boxers were trained and managed. The war had whittled down the number of young hopes, but the older men still trained and some young men in reserved occupations went there regularly. Bill Ebbutt's gymnasium was an unofficial club with hundreds of members, most of them connected with the ring, all well-trained and packing a pretty punch. No man who belonged to Bill's 'club' dabbled in the more vicious types of crime. The police would have liked to interview some, but even they admitted that members of the club were usually law-abiding.

Bill broke his silence at last.

"That's all right, Mr. Ar. I'll look arter the kids. It'll take a lot of men, mind yer – it might run you into a bit o' money, too, because they won't be able to do their ord'nary jobs while they're watching."

"There's no limit to expenses," Rollison said.

"That's good of you, Mr. Ar! P'raps you'll come rahnd and see me when yer can?"

"I will, before long," promised Rollison. "How soon can you get men to Little Lane?"

"Take me the best par've a coupla hours," declared Bill.

"Make it less if you can," urged Rollison, and rang off.

Walking back to Little Lane, he mused on the conversation. What had been left unsaid, a great deal. Ebbutt had preferred not to speak about Keller on the telephone, which was curious, and had presented an urgent plea for Rollison to go to see him. Something about Keller obviously worried Bill.

An hour and a half later, a knock at the door of Whiting's house heralded the arrival of three men from the gymnasium. Rollison spoke to them, to make sure that they were genuine 'club' members, gave instructions, and left the house with Kemp.

In the street, Kemp asked gruffly: "Who are those fellows, Rollison?"

"Good friends of mine, and they will be friends of yours if you show them what you can do with your fists," said Rollison. By the time he had finished explaining, they were back at the church hall.

As they attempted to tidy up the small room which Kemp used, Rollison spoke thoughtfully. "I should have fixed a bodyguard for you, too."

"Don't worry about me," said Kemp. "You've taken a load off my mind, and I don't know how to say thanks. I can look after myself, but when it comes to other people being victimised—" He broke off, and smiled. "You certainly know your way about!"

Rollison was on the point of leaving when a taxi drew up outside and Jolly arrived.

He had little information. No word of the trouble at the hall had yet reached Freddie Day or others whom Jolly had seen, but the hostility towards Kemp was already well known. Not until they were in the taxi, the driver of which was still in a good humour, did Jolly confide that the majority were taking a neutral attitude. Kemp had not yet made a very good impression among his parishioners.

"He will," said Rollison, confidently.

He told Jolly what had happened, before they reached the flat. Rollison paid the driver off, adding a pound to the fare, and walked upstairs with the man's gusty thanks ringing in his ears.

Jolly had gone ahead.

Afterwards, Rollison knew that he should have been prepared for some such development, although he had not thought of the possibility of a visit to the flat so early. As it was, he stepped inside the little hall, and saw Jolly standing motionless, with his back towards him, just inside the drawing

room. “What—” he began.

“That’s enough from you, Rollison,” said a voice from behind him.

Rollison forced himself not to turn too hastily, but his heart began to thump. The voice was that of the thick-set man whom he had seen at the back of Whiting’s house. He caught a glimpse of the owner of the educated voice, standing in front of Jolly. He got the impression that Jolly was being held up at the point of a gun, as he turned to look into the curiously docile looking brown eyes of the man with the growling voice.

CHAPTER FIVE

"I'm Keller."

Once he had recovered from the surprise, Rollison smiled into the man's face.

"Harry Keller, I presume," he said.

"I'm Keller, yes," answered the thick-set man. "When are you going to stop nosing into other people's business?"

"It's a congenital failing, I'm afraid," said Rollison, sadly, "I can't help myself."

"You'll help yourself this time," said Keller.

His assurance in itself was puzzling. If the visitors had planned an attack it would probably have been made when Rollison had walked unsuspectingly into the hall. It appeared more likely that Keller had come to reason with him, and that was puzzling.

"What makes you think so?" he inquired politely.

"We don't want that big parson around, and we don't intend to let him stay, Toff or no Toff. Nothing you can do will make any difference, but if you don't lay off, you will get hurt."

"Oh, dear," said Rollison, blankly.

"I mean *hurt,"* repeated Keller, harshly. "It won't help you to run to the dicks. They can't get at me, and I'm too powerful for you on your own. It's time you stayed where you belong."

"Where do you think that is?" asked Rollison.

"In the West End with all your fancy tarts and your wealthy friends," said Keller. "This isn't a game for you, Rollison. You might get your hands dirty." Rollison watched his mobile features, seeing the way his lips curled and his eyebrows rose. Keller was an impressive personality; it would be folly to underestimate him. "You stay in Mayfair, Rollison, and if you must stick your nose into things that don't concern you, there's plenty of cleaning up to be done in your own back yard. But you wouldn't try that, would you? You might find your precious friends are mixed up in it."

"In what?" asked Rollison, obtusely.

"You know what," rasped Keller. "I'm telling you to stick around your own back yard and not meddle in mine."

"A whole world, all of your own?" asked Rollison.

"If you won't take a warning, don't blame me for anything that happens. I don't want to interfere with you. You let me alone, I'll let you alone."

"Now who could say fairer than that?" asked Rollison, lightly. "What would you say if a policeman were to walk into the fiat this minute?" He studied the man curiously, and thought he had him guessing. "I don't suggest that it's likely, but I have all sorts of queer friends. I'd say to him: 'Bill' – or Percy, or whatever his name happened to be – 'this is Harry Keller.

He employed Spike Adams and Tom Harris to beat up the Rev. Ronald Kemp. He employed others to wreck a mission hall and do some hundreds of pounds worth of damage. He stole the knife belonging to a man named Craik and killed a third party with the said Craik's knife.'"

The atmosphere had grown noticeably more tense, while a movement from the drawing room made him glance at the man with the cultured voice, who was pushing past Jolly. He held a gun.

But no one spoke.

"Shall I go on?" Rollison asked. '"Having committed murder,' I would add, 'Keller worried because a man named Whiting knew about the stolen knife, so he visited Whiting and uttered threats and menaced the lives of Whiting's children. After that, he heard from Spike Adams or Tom Harris that I was a friend of Kemp, so he came here, burglariously entered my flat, threatened my valet with a gun, and uttered more menaces.' Then," continued Rollison, smiling faintly, "I would ask him how many years in gaol you'd be likely to get."

Keller spoke in a thin voice. "You don't know what you've done, Rollison."

"Oh, but I do," said Rollison. "I've frightened you and your friend. Queer thing, fear. I've made a study of it."

"Once and for all, Rollison, I'm telling you to stick to your own back yard!"

"But Whitechapel *is* mine," protested the Toff. "I was a frequenter of Jupe Street before you knew the difference between Whitechapel and Bethnal Green. What time did Grice say he'd be here, Jolly?"

Jolly answered with hardly a pause, as if he had been expecting the question, and Keller stiffened.

"At four o'clock, sir. I think he's a little late."

"Grice is on holiday!" Keller growled.

"He was – but he would make any sacrifice in a good cause," said Rollison, as if gratified. "When I asked him to come back, he promised to start right away. Of course, he'll be alone, so you might prefer to stay. One Superintendent of Scotland Yard won't make much difference to you. Besides, you are above the police."

"I know what I'm about," rasped Keller.

"That's splendid," declared Rollison.

"If you don't—"

"Oh, go away!" snapped Rollison, losing patience. "You and your empty threats – what do you expect to gain? You've already lined up half of Whitechapel behind Kemp. Before tonight they hadn't much time for him, now they're on his side. Go away, and assimilate a little common sense!" He sounded almost pettish as he turned away, passing Jolly and the second man and pushing the latter roughly to one side he strode into the drawing room, and picked up the telephone.

The success of the trick he had planned depended upon Jolly – who dodged back into the drawing room and slammed the door. Rollison

dropped the telephone and jumped to the door, putting his full weight against it as Jolly turned the key. Three heavy thuds shook it; then the men outside ceased trying to break it down.

Rollison and Jolly stood either side of the door, so that if Keller or his man fired into it, they would be out of harm's way.

Rollison spoke in a loud voice.

"Nicely done. Jolly!"

"Thank you, sir," said Jolly, soberly.

"I hope Grice doesn't run into them," Rollison went on, sounding anxious. "He's an impetuous beggar, and might start a riot. I'd better ring for someone else from the Yard," he added. He walked heavily round the room, then lifted the telephone and banged the receiver up and down several times.

The hall door slammed.

Rollison grinned. "That might be a pretty trick to make us show ourselves again, we'll stay where we are . . . Hallo, is that Scotland Yard? . . . Rollison speaking, give me Inspector Mason, please." After a pause, he went on: "Yes, Sergeant Hamilton will do . . . hallo, Hamilton? Send a couple of your liveliest men round to the flat, will you? I'm locked in my own drawing room, with two homicidal maniacs in the hall, threatening to . . . yes, of course I'm serious!"

The startled sergeant promised that he would send men immediately, and Rollison replaced the receiver.

The flat was on the first floor and it would be possible to climb out of the window and surprise Keller from the rear. But he had no weapon, and had a healthy respect for the other's gun. Even if he only tried to follow them, it was so dark that they would probably shake him off. It would be best to stay where he was, confident that the flat would be clear of the intruders by the time the police arrived.

He and Jolly conversed in whispers, but that soon palled. They heard nothing for five minutes, then a car drew up outside and heavy footsteps came thumping on the stairs. Not until the police were outside the flat did Rollison unlock the drawing room door, and let them in.

Sergeant Hamilton, tall, fair and brisk, hoped Rollison had not been pulling his leg.

"I have not!" Rollison assured him, fervently, "I expected the men to try to break the door down, but they heard me telephoning you and decided not to wait."

"Who were they?" demanded Hamilton.

"I haven't the faintest idea," said Rollison.

Afterwards, when the police had gone and as dawn was breaking, he told Jolly that he did not propose to mention Keller's name to the police until he knew more about the man. For one thing, Keller's certainty that he was in no danger from the police, was a remarkable thing. For another, he wanted to feel the pulse of the East End before he stirred up police action. He had been perfectly serious when he had told Kemp that it would be better to

fight on his own for the time being – the masses of the district would rally round him, when it was seen that he was trying to fight single-handed – or even with help from the Toff.

At a quarter-past five, Rollison went to bed.

At a quarter to eight, Jolly called him, for Rollison, an acting Colonel, was due at his office in Whitehall by nine-thirty. He had the week before him, for it was only Tuesday, and there was little chance of getting leave; the only way of doing that, he complained to Jolly, was to go sick.

"Won't you await events before taking that step?" asked Jolly.

"You mean won't I give you a free hand?" said Rollison, smiling unamusedly. "I suppose I'll have to. See Kemp and the Whitings, and keep me in touch with what happens. I'll lunch at the club, so ring me there."

"Very good, sir," said Jolly.

And the Toff, sadly, set out for Whitehall.

Twice in the course of the morning, a colleague said with some exasperation that he was not giving his mind to the subject under discussion, and twice he apologised and tried to pull himself together. In truth, he was apprehensive lest the Whitings had been made to suffer for their boldness. The one reassuring factor was that Bill Ebbutt had sounded as if he knew what kind of proposition he was up against with Keller, and would take elaborate precautions. It was absurd that Keller should be able to inspire such apprehension, and equally absurd that he should be so self-assured.

"But he isn't!" exclaimed Rollison, aloud.

"Now look here, Rolly," said plump, bespectacled Colonel Bimbleton, "you know perfectly well that he was."

"Eh?" asked Rollison.

"Oh, you're impossible!" declared Bimbleton, then peered at him with sudden interest. "I say, Rolly, is something up?"

"Up is *the* word," said Rollison. "I'm sorry, Bimble, but I can't concentrate on this report. Would you care to have a shot at it yourself?"

Bimbleton regarded him curiously.

"Well, I don't mind trying," he conceded, "provided you'll look through it afterwards, and make sure I haven't pulled a boner."

Rollison promised this, and Bimbleton went off to wrestle with a report on pilfering from army stores depots, a task which Whitehall, in all its wisdom, had ordained to be eminently suitable for a man known to associate with the police.

Jolly did not telephone the office or the club.

After lunch, Rollison hurried back to the office, but his clerk, a plump A.T.S. sergeant, had no message for him.

In his cogitations, Rollison had got no further than that Keller *was* afraid of the police taking action against him, but had reason to think that a lot of prodding would be needed to make them. Keller had been at great pains to try to make sure that Whiting said nothing about the episode of the stolen knife, although there was nothing original in his methods. There were

occasional outbursts of intimidation in the East End, and sometimes a terror wave which rarely lasted long once it was discovered by the authorities, but which might have gained a powerful hold before the police learned of it. Many a man had been frightened into refusing to give evidence, even to committing perjury, by threats such as Keller had made to Whiting.

Two inescapable facts troubled Rollison most.

One was that a man whose name he did not yet know had been murdered, and – judging from the evidence so far available – one Joe Craik had been framed for the murder. The second was that Keller had a very powerful reason for wanting to drum the curate out of the St. Guy's district.

He dictated letters and signed them, made a brief report on a matter he had been handling by himself, went over Bimbleton's prosy report with its author and made a few comments, and left for Gresham Terrace.

Jolly was not at the flat.

Rollison began to feel worried about his man; even if there was nothing to report, Jolly should have telephoned by now. When at last the telephone rang, he hurried to it, hoping to hear Jolly's voice. Instead, he heard Kemp's – and Kemp sounded excited.

CHAPTER SIX

More News From Kemp

"Great Scott, Rollison, I've been trying to get you all the afternoon!" exclaimed Kemp. "Where the dickens have you been?"

"I should have given you my office number," said Rollison. "You'd better take a note of it."

"Never mind that! Can you come here at once?"

"What's the trouble?" "

"I've had a visit from a most astonishing fellow," said Kemp, amazement making his voice shrill. "I don't know his name, but you should have heard the way he talked! He told me that if you didn't stop interfering, he would mighty soon make you!"

"Did he have brown eyes and a gruff voice?"

"Yes, he did. How did you know?"

"He calls himself Keller," said Rollison. "Don't worry about his threats. Did he do anything?"

He heard Kemp's sharp intake of breath.

"He didn't actually do anything," said the curate. "But – he made the most astonishing offer. He offered to replace all the damaged goods at the hall and give five hundred pounds to St. Guy's Relief Fund, if—" Kemp grew almost incoherent.

"If you resigned?" asked Rollison.

"Yes!"

"What did you tell him?"

"I told him," said Kemp, in a deep voice, *"exactly* where to get off!"

"That's the spirit!" acclaimed Rollison, feeling considerably relieved, "I was afraid you might have fallen for it."

"I might have done yesterday," said Kemp, "but not now – I've heard a lot about you today. Last night, I only had your name and the little I'd heard about you from the Whitings, but today—"

"Spare my blushes," said Rollison. "How did you part with our brown-eyed briber?"

"Well, as a matter of fact," said Kemp, less boisterously, "I felt a bit uneasy. He's a funny customer, isn't he? He went out breathing threats, and said he would give me forty-eight hours to change my mind. He also said *you* would have forty-eight, but I'm not particularly worried about *you."*

"So he's given a time limit, has he?" asked Rollison. "Don't let yourself be caught napping any time during the next forty-eight hours. Did he have anything else to say?"

"Have you thought of anything that might be the cause of the trouble?"

"I've wracked my brains, but I can't think of anything," declared Kemp. "In fact, I don't think there can"Of course there is," interrupted Rollison.

“How are the Whitings?”

“They’re all right. Those friends of yours have been to and from school with two of the youngsters. It was really funny this afternoon, one of the children is only eighteen months old, and Mrs. Whiting and the grandmother pushed him out to the shops, with two hefties walking behind them. It caused quite a sensation.”

“Good!” said Rollison. “Publicity is always useful.”

He omitted to say that Kemp’s spirits seemed to be much brighter, and asked: “Have you seen my man?”

“That glum looking fellow, what’s his name?”

“Jolly.”

“What?” asked Kemp, incredulously, and then added hastily: “No, I haven’t seen him. Should he have come here?”

“No, it’s all right,” said Rollison.

He rang down, after promising to see Kemp later. He was worried, but smiled from time to time when he thought of Keller’s offer. After setting his roughnecks on Kemp, attempted bribery was a climb-down – but it told him how seriously Keller intended to get rid of the curate.

Ten minutes later, the telephone rang again. This time, Rollison heard his man’s prim voice.

“Good evening, sir.”

“Well, well!” said Rollison, and added sarcastically: “It’s nice of you to ring me.”

“I’m sorry that I had no opportunity of telephoning earlier,” said Jolly, stolidly, “but my inquiries took me out of London, and I had to choose between continuing with them and advising you that I could not do so. I came to the conclusion—”

“Yes, you were right,” said Rollison, hastily. “Where are you now?”

“In Loughton, sir, near Epping Forest. I—” There was a short pause, before Jolly went on in a sharper voice: “I am quite all right, but I must go now. I will telephone again at the earliest opportunity. Goodbye, sir!”

Rollison heard the receiver bang down.

He sat contemplating the telephone for some time. It was rare that Jolly allowed himself to be hurried, and he had taken his time at the beginning of the conversation. Only one likely explanation presented itself – that Jolly was keeping watch on someone, who had reappeared sooner than he had expected. Reassured, Rollison did not waste time in more than passing speculation on what had taken Jolly to Loughton.

He looked through the evening papers for an account of the murder of the previous night. It was tucked away on an inside page, and contained the statement that the murdered man’s name was O’Hara. Joseph Craik, of la, Jupe Street, had been charged with the murder and been remanded for eight days. Det. Sergeant Bray, of Scotland Yard, had made the arrest. Inspector Chumley, of the AZ. Division, was not so much as mentioned.

“I suppose I shall have to find out what they’re doing sooner or later,” Rollison mused.

Yet the more he pondered, the more determined he became to let the police make the first move. Craik would come to no harm while under remand – he might even be safer in Brixton than in his shop. Had Superintendent Grice been at the Yard, Rollison would have taken a different course; he could talk to Grice off the record and be sure that confidences would be respected, provided the law was not too openly flouted.

A ring at the front door interrupted him.

He opened it, warily, to see a vision in a flowered frock and a wide-brimmed hat, with a radiant smile and a beauty spoiled only by a nose which some called *retrousse.* There were few callers he would have welcomed at that juncture, unless they were concerned in the affair of the harassed curate, but he felt a genuine pleasure at the sight of Isobel Crayne.

"Rolly!" she cried.

"Hal-b!" He took her hand and kissed her on the cheek, which she presented laughingly. Then he held her at arm's length and eyed her with his head on one side and a gay smile in his eyes.

"Yes," he said at last. "An improvement, even in you! Isobel, it's good to see you!"

"What an ass you are!" said Isobel, allowing herself to be drawn through the hall into the drawing room. She took off her hat and dropped it into an easy chair, looking at him all the time. "How are *you,* Rolly?"

"I *was* jaded," declared Rollison. "In fact I was wondering how I could cheer myself up and lo! I open the door and a vision enters."

"Jaded?" asked Isobel, quickly. "Why?"

"Oh, the weather," began Rollison.

"The weather never worried you yet, and I don't believe it ever will," said Isobel. "And I don't believe you are ever at a loose end."

"And I thought you'd come to ask me to take you out to dinner!"

"Well, I haven't, I'm on duty tonight," said Isobel, "I haven't had an evening free for weeks."

"Don't rub it in," said Rollison. "I can't dance attendance on you like your young men, and—"

"Rolly," said Isobel, still smiling but with a more serious note in her voice, "I'm afraid you'll want to show me the door when I tell you why I've come, but – well, I felt that I had to. It's rather a queer business. Are you very busy?"

"That depends," said Rollison, "if I can help you in any way I gladly will. I confound you!" He broke off, laughing at her. "I wondered why you spoke up when I said I was jaded, you thought it meant that I'd jump at any excitements you might be able to offer. Isobel, you're too cunning for beauty!"

"*Are* you busy?" persisted Isobel.

"It still depends on what you want," said Rollison.

He poured her out a long drink; the weather was still hot, although cooler than the previous day, and there was a breeze fresh enough to stir the

curtains at the windows. A clear blue sky was visible above the house-tops, and just within sight a barrage balloon floated with lazy majesty, as if disdainful of all that went on below.

To some people, Isobel Crayne appeared disdainful, too, for she had a careless manner, at times one almost of condescension; but the Toff knew her for a warm-hearted young woman who did much good privately. She was working for one of the voluntary organizations, and had been doing so since the beginning of the war. Not only did it take up most of her time, but it also cost her a great deal of money.

Abruptly, she said: "I've been working in your favourite hunting ground for some time, Rolly."

"East of Aldgate Pump?"

"Yes. We've a depot down there."

"Much good work by the Red Cross?"

Isobel looked at him in astonishment.

"What a hopeless memory you've got! I've told you a dozen times that I do *not* work for the Red Cross. I'm W.V.S., and we're running canteens for dock workers. I can't imagine how you built up such a reputation as a detective, if you forget so easily."

"I forget what it isn't necessary to remember," said Rollison, justifying himself urbanely. "Whether you work for the Red Cross, Aid to China, Aid to Russia, Book Salvage, National Savings, Bone Recovery, A.R.P. or any one of a dozen other equally worthy causes doesn't matter; that you do the work matters a great deal."

"I am not impressed," said Isobel. "In any case, A.R.P. is now Civil Defence! Are you trying to sidetrack me?"

"Certainly not. I'm waiting patiently for you to get to the point."

Isobel made a face at him.

"I don't suppose it's anything that would interest you," she went on, "but if you can possibly look into it, I would be glad. Honestly, I think it's a deserving case. Don't look like that!" she exclaimed, as Rollison's expression grew long-suffering. "It's not a girl who's taken the wrong turning or a father of twelve who's been picking pockets. It's about—" Rollison's expression altered so much that Isobel broke off and stared at him, and then went on: "A young curate, who—"

"Well, well!" exclaimed Rollison, "so Ronald Kemp has a way with him!"

"You *know* about it?" asked Isobel, incredulously.

"I've heard about it," said Rollison. "And you can set your mind at rest. If the great Richard R. can turn the scales, the scales are in the process of being turned. How did Kemp win you to his side?"

"He doesn't even know my name," Isobel told him. "I heard him preach in Mayfair some time ago, and he came to the depot the other day, to see if we had a few odds-and-ends that he needed for a rummage sale. Have you met him?"

"Yes."

"No one should have allowed him to go down there," declared Isobel.

“He’s hopelessly out of place. I felt sorry for him the moment I saw him, and in the last day or two I’ve heard rumours that he’s being persecuted. But you probably know all about that?”

“A lot about it,” said Rollison.

“Then I needn’t worry anymore.”

“I call that praise indeed,” smiled Rollison. “I say, my sweet,” he went on anxiously, “you haven’t been campaigning on Kemp’s behalf, have you? I know that crusading heart of yours might have tempted you.”

“I’ve learned not to interfere with anything that happens, unless it’s right under my nose,” said Isobel. “The East Enders take me on sufferance as it is, but if I started to throw my weight about, they’d boycott me. I just felt terribly sorry for Kemp.”

“Don’t waste your sympathy,” advised Rollison. “He is either just the man for the district and is getting the corners smoothed off, or else he’s a misfit and he’ll find that out soon enough.”

“I suppose you’re right,” said Isobel, looking at him curiously. “You’re much deeper than I realise, sometimes.”

“Thanks,” said Rollison, wryly. “Now – I hate throwing advice about, but don’t line yourself up with Kemp just yet on any account. I don’t mean that you mustn’t be sympathetic if he should come and pour out his troubles, which isn’t likely, but don’t let yourself be persuaded to take an active interest in the affairs of the parish.”

Isobel’s eyes were calm.

“So it’s dangerous?” she observed.

“It might be.”

“Look after him,” pleaded Isobel. “He’s only a child.”

When she left, Rollison watched her tall graceful figure as she walked towards Piccadilly. She was about Kemp’s age, and her: ‘He’s only a child,’ echoed ironically in his ears.

He left the fiat ten minutes later.

One pressing need was to see Bill Ebbutt, to find out what Bill knew of Keller and why he had been so silent on the telephone. It was a little after half-past six and he hoped to finish with Bill and spend half an hour with Kemp before getting back for a late dinner and, he hoped, Jolly’s report.

He went by tube, got out at Whitechapel Station, and walked along Whitechapel Road. Bill’s pub, the Blue Dog, was on a corner. Behind it was a large, corrugated iron shed, which served as the gymnasium. The pub was closed, but the gymnasium doors were open. Rollison bunched his fists, thinking that it would do him good to spend half-an-hour sparring with one of the younger men, or else on the medicine ball, but he quickly cast all thought of such frivolities out of his mind.

Near the door, he was aware of loud noises.

His smile broadened; it sounded as if half-a-dozen of Bill’s ‘lads’ were having a set-to at one and the same time, probably a free-for-all show which Bill had introduced at the urgent request of youths who were looking forward to joining the Commandos and wanted to be able to teach the Army

it's job.

As he reached the door, a man somersaulted backwards into the street, and not of his own accord. He fell heavily, but picked himself up and scuttled away, towards the docks. He was thoroughly frightened – a little, wizened man who did not look like one of Bill's faithfuls.

Rollison pushed aside a tarpaulin which was used for blackout, and stepped inside. A man fell against him, but recovered quickly and his fist cracked into the face of a grizzled veteran of the ring, whose head went back but whose right arm shot out to land a punch which rattled his opponent's teeth. Everywhere, there was the wildest of free-for-alls. A dozen individual bouts were in progress, the battering of fists on faces and bodies, and the harsh breathing of the fighters filled the big room; but no one was wearing gloves, and at least two men were using knuckledusters.

In the centre of the room, on the floor with two men kneeling on him and battering his face and head, was Bill Ebbutt.

CHAPTER SEVEN

A Round To Club Members

Rollison moved forward, but had to side-step two couples engaged in furious battle, and as he passed a man whose right fist wore the ugly, spiked knuckleduster characteristic of the East End mobsman, he clouted him on the side of the head. The fellow's opponent, a much older man whose right cheek was opened and bleeding, did not appear to see Rollison, but went in furiously with both fists.

Rollison tried to reach Bill, who was fighting back fiercely. They were using coshes on him, but he was avoiding many of the blows.

A little, thin-faced fellow stood up from a man who was gasping on the ground, saw Rollison, and jumped at him. Rollison shot out his foot and sent the man reeling backwards. His victim banged into one of Bill's men, who tore into him. Next moment, Rollison was hauling one assailant off Bill, using his elbow against a bony chin. The other man was smashing at Bill's head, and Rollison gripped him about the waist and hauled him into the air. He put his knee into the small of his back and shot him forward; he hit the ground and lay still.

Bruised but not bloody, Bill blinked up.

"Gaw blimey O'Reilly!" he gasped. "Ta – Mr. Ar! Look aht!"

Rollison turned, to see a man coming towards him brandishing a knife. He used his foot again and toppled the man over. The fighting was savage and desperate, with the members of the club heavily outnumbered. Since none of them had weapons – except two who were swinging Indian clubs – the odds were against them. Rollison rushed across to the wall, picked up two more Indian clubs, and began to swing them. The odds were still heavy, but suddenly there was a clatter of footsteps outside and half-a-dozen men burst in, three of them in khaki. They were reinforcements for the 'club', and they weighed in with a violence which altered the whole course of the struggle.

Realising that their chance had gone, the assailants escaped as and when they could, running the gauntlet towards the door. A massive veteran stood by it, and clouted each man as he dodged out.

Rollison put down his clubs, smoothed his hair, and went over to Bill Ebbutt, who was now standing in the middle of the room and directing operations like a guerrilla leader. He said nothing until only three of the attacking party remained, all unconscious.

"I could do with a pint, I could," Ebbutt declared, looking at Rollison with one eye closed up and already swelling to huge proportions. "You come just at the right time, Mr. Ar. You know 'ow to work it, doncha."

"Just luck," said Rollison. "I'd no idea what was happening."

"I noo it was bound to come," said Ebbutt, philosophically. He was a

large man, running to fat but still very powerful. His features were rugged and battered, for he had spent thirty years in the ring, but his ears were curiously small and well-shaped; it was his dictum that a boxer who allowed himself to get cauliflower ears should take up stone-breaking. “Ho, yes, I noo,” he went on, trying to grin although his mouth was nearly as swollen as his eyes, and he uttered the words with great difficulty. “Charlie!”

“Callin’ me?” demanded a little man with enormously wide shoulders.

“Who’d yer think I’m callin’?” growled Ebbutt. “Fetch some beer and glasses, mate, an’ be quick about it. An’ fetch me a coupla pound o’ beefsteak!” he added. “Strewth, Mr. Ar, wartime’s a bad time to get a black eye, ain’t it? I don’t know wot my missus will say when she sees me.” He made a brave attempt to wink. “I’d better tell ‘er it was your fault, that’ll keep ‘er quiet!”

He roared again. The beer arrived, and the club members, now twenty strong and increasing every minute, for an S.O.S. had been sent out when the melee had started, began to drink eagerly. Of the three men who had been knocked out, two had recovered and been literally kicked out of the room; the other was still on the floor conscious, but detained for interrogation. He looked terrified, and proved to be genuinely dumb.

The fight had started about a quarter of an hour before Rollison had arrived, when only half-a-dozen ‘club’ members had been present. The purpose, Ebbutt declared with assurance, had been to beat him up; he didn’t think Rollison would need telling why.

“No,” agreed Rollison. “Keller wants to prise you off the Whitings.”

It had been a likely enough move, although he had not expected one to materialise so quickly. The place had been admirably chosen. A beating-up in the street, by daylight, was a risky business, for it might bring the police, while after dark Ebbutt always had plenty of men with him. Also, Ebbutt told Rollison, as soon as he had known what the job was, he had locked his door and made sure no one could get in at his window. “I know somefink about Keller,” he remarked, darkly.

“I hadn’t heard of him until a day or two ago,” said Rollison.

“No more you didn’t want to,” declared Ebbutt. ‘”E’s a swine, Mr. Ar, I don’t mind sayin’ so – he’s a proper swine.”

“How long has he been about?” asked Rollison.

“Three or four munce,” said Ebbutt. “No, more’n that. Six munce.”

“What’s he up to?”

“No use arstin’ me,” said Ebbutt. “I minds me own business, you know that. ‘E’s a proper swine, Keller is. It’s my business all right now,” he went on, and made a comical effort to lick his lips. “I don’t half sting,” he added, and managed to get beer past his lips. ‘”Ave another, Mr. Ar?”

“Not yet, thanks,” said Rollison. “Don’t you know anything about Keller’s game?”

“I only knows that he’s got a mob and is runnin’ a racket,” declared Bill. “I dunno what the racket is. Tell yer somefing, Mr. Ar.”

Rollison waited.

"Tell yer somefing wot will surprise yer," declared Ebbutt. "'E's 'ad a go at arf-a-dozen *other* swine. Blokes I wouldn't-a' minded bashin' meself. Mr. Ar, that's a fact. No business o' mine, then, seein' as he was goin' fer swine. But some of the things 'e did to them – it would make yer scalp crawl, Mr. Ar. It would reely. There was one fella – Tiny Blow, you know Tiny Blow? 'E was inside fer lootin'." Rollison nodded. "Well, Tiny come out about four munce ago," went on Ebbutt. '"E started thro win's weight about. Keller hadn't started, it was the first time I 'eard of 'im. I did hear that Tiny started a fight in the Docker, and waited fer Lucy – been at the Docker ten yers, Lucy has." Ebbutt sniffed. "Don't know that I think much of her, but Tiny didn't ought to 'ave waited for 'er. Bad thing for 'im he did, because four of Keller's mob was waiting for him. He's still in the 'orspital. If it 'ad been anyone else but Tiny, I woulda' bin sorry for 'im."

"And the other cases have been as bad?"

"More or less," assented Ebbutt. "Except that I thought he was goin' too far when he started on this parson bloke, Kemp." Ebbutt sniffed again. "I got nothin' *against* Kemp, but he oughta know that he didn't oughta come down to a place like this. He's a *torf*. Don't take me wrong, Mr. Ar!" exclaimed Ebbutt, hurriedly. "I never meant nothin' personal!"

"No offence taken, Bill!"

"Then that's all right," went on Ebbutt, but elaborated the point. "I wouldn't like yer ter think I was bein' personal; there are *torfs* an' *torfs."* On the first utterance, he managed to give the word an astonishingly contemptuous ring; on the second, one of unveiled admiration. "Well, there you are! When you ask me to lend a 'and, I was only too 'appy, Mr. Ar. Funny thing," he added, reflectively, "I wouldn't 'ave expected Kemp to come to you, 'e looks the kind to run to the dicks."

"What do you know about Joe Craik?" asked Rollison.

Ebbutt finished his beer, summoned Charlie and demanded a refill, wiped his lips gingerly, and then turned his one open eye on Rollison.

"Don't get me wrong, Mr. Ar. There's persons an' persons. Goin' to church never did no one any 'arm wot I can see, except it made hypocrites aht've some o' them. But I've 'ad some good boys, *very* good boys, from the church clubs, scouts an' boys' brigades an' things. I don't hold wiv goin' to church meself, though I don't mind a good Army meeting sometimes; they've got a bit of go, the Army. If it wasn't for them always 'alley uya4ng an' arskin' you to confess yer sins up in front've everyone, I wouldn't mind the Army. My own missus wears the uniform," he added, somewhat shamefacedly.

"She's got to keep you in line somehow," said Rollison, lightly.

Ebbutt grinned, then winced.

"Doan 'arf sting," he complained, absently. "Yes, I agree, Mr. Ar. She has somefink ter put up wiv', but wot I was saying is, I'm not perjudiced against churches an' things. Some persons is sincere, some isn't, and I 'aven't got no time for them that isn't. But I never bin able to make up me mind about Craik."

Sooner or later, Bill always got to the point.

‘”E’s gotta good business,” he declared, “and he gives his customers fair doos. Ain’t never ‘eard that he’s in the market, ‘e don’t seem ter touch undercover stuff. But between you an’ me, Mr. Ar, I don’t like his face!”

Rollison grinned.

“It ain’t because it’s ugly,” Bill assured him, solemnly, ‘”E’s got a face as good as the next man, but I just never took to it. Thassall I got against Craik. My missus thinks he’s okay.”

“I haven’t seen him yet,” said Rollison. “I’ll tell you what I think about his face when I’ve had a look at it! You know nothing else?”

“Ain’t that enough, Mr. Ar?”

“No. I want to find out what Keller is up to.”

Ebbutt deliberated, and then opined that, just as Keller’s mob had beaten up ‘swine’, there was evidence that Keller was putting into effect a widespread but often undeclared antagonism to Ronald Kemp. It was a case of oil and water, Ebbutt declared.

“Does Billy the Bull still come in here?” Rollison asked.

“Every night, faithful. ‘E’ll be ‘ere soon. On the docks, ‘e is. Maybe ‘e *is* past ‘is prime,” continued the ex-fighter, a little regretfully, “but there still ain’t a dozen men in England could stand five rounds against Billy the Bull. Why’d you want to know?”

Rollison lowered his voice. At intervals during the next five minutes, Ebbutt emitted squeaks of delight and finally managed to part his lips in a smile which showed his discoloured teeth.

Soon afterwards, Rollison left the gymnasium.

He walked to the mission hall, going out of his way to pass 49, Little Lane – named after a benefactor, not because it was any different from a thousand other long, drab, featureless streets in the East End. Front doors were open, women and old men were talking, children were playing on the cobbles, and dirt abounded; but some of the tiny windows looked spotlessly clean and some of the women were as well-dressed as they knew how to be. In spite of every disadvantage, there was an air of prosperity about Little Lane. It revealed itself in new boots on many of the children, in the fact that most of the people were smoking, in the gay splashes of lipstick and rouge on faces which had not known them for years.

A dozen friendly people called out to Rollison, others smiled and nodded, and as he went out of earshot there was much earnest chattering. Outside Number 49 were two of Bill’s stalwarts. He was glad to see them on duty.

Kemp was in the mission hall with three other men and a woman.

The place was fairly ship-shape again. Only a dozen chairs out of two hundred were undamaged, but the men were hammering and knocking them into shape. The walls had been cleaned, but they still bore traces of the paint. The warning remained at the back of the stage – a good touch, thought Rollison. He asked Kemp why he hadn’t removed or covered it.

The curate, dressed in old flannels and an open-necked shirt, which made him look more boyish than ever, grinned widely.

"I'll take it down when it's no longer true."

"Happy thought," said Rollison. "How are things?"

"There's nothing fresh to report," said Kemp. "I told you all about Keller's offer. I'm a bit worried about that," he added, frowning. "We could use £500 – I mean, the Relief Fund could. I have wondered whether I ought to resign, and let—"

"Don't be an ass," said Rollison. "You can raise the money if you put your mind to it."

"I suppose I can," said Kemp, rather lugubriously. "Anyhow, I wouldn't leave just now for a fortune. I'm beginning to enjoy myself."

"Yer don't know what injoyment means," said a man from the door, in a loud voice.

All six people turned abruptly, to see a giant standing in the doorway, almost filling it. His shoulders were enormous and his chest deep and powerful, and he held his knuckly hands in front of him. He was remarkably ugly, and the most astonishing thing about him was the likeness of his face to a cow's. His forehead, although broad, receded. He seemed to have no chin, and his lips were very full and wide.

"I don't think you were invited," said Kemp, after a pregnant pause.

"You don't, doncher? *'Hi* don't think you was hinvited!" mimicked Billy the Bull, with a vast grin – and a shrill burst of laughter came from behind him, the first indication that he was not alone. "Why'n't yer go 'ome, Kemp?"

After a moment's hesitation, Kemp advanced towards the man. Rollison and the others watched – Rollison was inwardly smiling, and the three men and the woman obviously anxious.

"I don't know who you are," Kemp said, clearly, "but it wouldn't surprise me if you know who wrecked the hall. Do you?"

"Supposin' I do?" growled Billy the Bull.

"If I thought you did it," said Kemp, softly, "I'd smash your silly face in!"

Stupefaction reigned among the church workers, and astonishment showed on Billy the Bull's bovine countenance.

The silence was broken by a piping voice from behind Billy. A man who did not come up to his shoulder, and was thin, bald-headed and dressed in a dirty sweater with a polo collar in spite of the heat, pushed his way in to stand by Billy.

"I wouldn't let him git away wiv' *that,* Billy. I wouldn't let no one say he'd bash *my* face in!"

Billy the Bull licked his lips.

"Take that back!" There was menace in his manner.

"If you haven't the guts to admit that you helped to smash this place up, you're not worth wasting time on," said Kemp. "If you did, I'll—"

"'It him, Billy!" urged the little man, indignantly.

"I don't fight hinfants," declared Billy, scowling. "But I wouldn't mind knocking the grin orf yer face, parson. Talk, that's all you're good for. Standin' up in the poolpit an' shouting yer marf orf – that's all yer can do.

‘Please Gawd, make me an’ all me flock good lickle boys an’ gels,’” continued Billy, in a fair imitation of the worst type of clerical drawl. “Please Gawd—”

Kemp said quietly: “Don’t say that again.”

Billy broke off, looking at the curate in surprise. Kemp had gone pale, and his fists were clenched.

It was the little man who broke the silence again, piping: “Strewth! Have yer gorn sorft, Billy? *‘It* ‘im.”

“I don’t like knockin’ hinfants about,” repeated Billy. Something in Kemp’s expression had stopped him, and he was obviously on edge. It was Rollison’s cue, and he moved forward.

“You do a bit of boxing, Billy, don’t you?”

“A bit!” squeaked the little man. “Why there ain’t a man in London can stand a round against ‘im!”

“I can use me mits,” declared Billy the Bull, on safer ground. “But this apology fer a parson only shoots ‘is mouth orf, that’s all. Cissy-boy!” he added. “You ought to be back ‘ome, wiv’ yer muvver!”

“I’ll fight you anywhere you like, under the Queensberry Rules,” Kemp said, tense-voiced.

“Coo, ‘ear that?” squeaked the little man, dancing up and down. ‘”E’s ‘eard o’ Lord Queensb’ry. Coo!

Ain’t ‘e a proper little man! Why yer don’t know wot fightin’ is!”

“Don’t be rash,” Rollison advised Kemp, looking now as if he wished he had not mentioned boxing. “Billy’s an old campaigner.”

“I’ll fight him anywhere he likes,” Kemp said again. “You mean that?” demanded the little man, coming forward and peering up into Kemp’s face. “You mean that – no, o’ corse yer don’t! There’s a ring not a hundred miles from ‘ere, I’ll fix yer up a match ‘ere an’ now, for tonight. Pound aside, one quid per man, but you don’t mean it.”

“I’m not a—” began Kemp.

“The stakes to go to charity,” Rollison put in hastily. “Suits me,” said the little man, loftily. “I managed Billy the Bull all his life, I ain’t above doin’ a bit for charity.”

“Does he mean it?” demanded Billy the Bull, incredulously. “Try to make them understand that I’m not afraid of his size, will you?” Kemp asked Rollison, earnestly.

Rollison nodded, and fixed the details quickly.

Billy the Bull and his companion stalked off, the sound of the little man’s squeaky voice drifting back into the hall. The woman helper looked troubled, but the three men eyed Kemp with a new respect. Kemp himself seemed unperturbed. One by one, the others left the hall.

“Do you think. . .” Kemp began, when they had gone, and talked almost without stopping for twenty minutes.

Meanwhile, the grapevine of the East End, that remarkable information system rivalling the drums of Africa, began to work at high pressure. It played one refrain only. *“Kemp’s fighting Billy the Bull at Bill Ebbutt’s – nine*

o'clock. Kemp's fighting Billy the Bull at Bill Ebbutt's – nine o'clock."

News reached many unexpected places. It amazed most who heard it, it alarmed the Whitings, it brought church members post haste to try to dissuade Kemp from going on with it – all to no purpose – it brought protests from the more influential church members; and it put Kemp's stock up to undreamed of heights, although he did not realise it.

It reached Keller.

It also reached the dockside canteen where Isobel Crayne was working.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Parson With A Punch

By a quarter-past eight, there was room for neither man nor boy in Bill's gymnasium. By half-past, there was a great exodus, for Bill had made hurried arrangements with the management of a nearby indoor stadium for the fight to be staged there. When Rollison heard about that, he telephoned Bill, who hardly finished speaking before he was roaring to his men: "Mr. Ar. says a bob-a-time. Charge 'em a bob-a-time-money fer charity. See to it, a bob-a-time."

The entrance fee made no difference to the crowd. The stadium could hold four thousand and was packed when Rollison and Kemp arrived. Kemp showed no sign of nerves, but was anxious to slip in unobserved. Rollison promised that he would try to arrange it, but by a deliberate mistake, took the curate through the crowded hall. There were roars of interest, not so much of applause as of excited comment.

A sprinkling of women were present, and in one corner, near the ring, were the Whitings and a body of people at whom Kemp stared in astonishment.

"Do you see that crowd near the Whitings, Rolly?"

"What about them?" asked Rollison.

"They're from the church," Kemp said, dazedly. "They – Great Scott, what's brought *them* here?"

"You want some fans, don't you?" asked Rollison.

Kemp shot him a sideways glance, then forced his way through the narrow gangway towards the dressing rooms. Bill Ebbutt was in his element, his right eye so swollen that it almost doubled the size of his face, and his mouth was puffed out, but grinning. "You oughta see the gate!" he chortled. "You oughta see it!"

"Are they charging?" asked Kemp, surprised.

"The money is for charity," Rollison said, and added: "To be chosen by the winner – shall we make that a condition?"

"Can you lay down any laws?"

"I can try," said Rollison.

The master of ceremonies, a tall, portly man who had hastily donned his tail-suit, entered the ring at ten minutes to nine, and announced through the microphone that there was to be a ten-round contest between heavyweights, Billy the Bull and the Parson with a Punch. That new nickname brought down the house. All the profits from the engagement were to go to any charity named by the winner, continued the M.C. There was another roar of approval. The M.C. concluded after lauding Billy the Bull, and doing his best for the unknown contender.

At five to nine, one of Bill's men sought out Rollison, who was in Kemp's

dressing room.

"There's a lady arstin' for you, Mr. Ar. She can't git in; the stadium's overcrowded already. If we ain't careful the cops will be arstin' what about it."

"Did she give her name?" asked Rollison.

"Yus. Miss Crine."

"Isobel!" exclaimed Rollison. He glanced at Kemp, who was having his hands bandaged. The curate looked in fine condition, although he was puny compared with Billy the Bull. The other Bill had appointed seconds who were fussing round the curate as if he had been in their charge for years. Whiting had come to join them, and his thin cheeks were flushed with excitement.

"All right, I'll come," said Rollison.

Isobel was standing at the head of a crowd at least two hundred strong, who were shouting to be admitted. Three policemen were on duty by the door, refusing to admit another spectator. On the fringes of the crowd a red-faced man smiled as he saw Rollison.

"Rolly, you can't let this go on!" exclaimed Isobel.

"Oh, my dear," said Rollison, smiling. "It's Kemp's biggest chance. He'll never get another like it."

"You've arranged it, haven't you?"

"I did set the wheels in motion," admitted Rollison.

She eyed him without smiling.

"It isn't fair," she said at last. "He can't win!"

"Don't take anything for granted," advised Rollison. "But come in and see it yourself. You've seen a fight before."

"Do you really think he stands a chance?"

"I don't think it will be slaughter," said Rollison. "Will you come?"

"Yes." Isobel remained unsmiling, although there was a brighter look in her eyes.

As Rollison was about to force his way past the turnstile, the man with the red face touched his arm. He looked round, to see Inspector Chumley, of the A.Z. Division, Metropolitan Police. Chumley was still smiling; he looked a genial man.

"One of your little games, Mr. Rollison?"

"If you care to think so," said Rollison.

"I want a word with you, about O'Hara's murder."

"Come and see the fight," said Rollison, "and talk to me about O'Hara afterwards."

"Ml right," said Chumley. "Be glad to."

He followed as Rollison led Isobel into the stadium.

The crowd was on its feet, roaring as Billy the Bull stepped through the ropes. He was a colossal, impressive figure, and when stripped, he looked even more massive than he did when clothed. The bald-headed little man was hopping about at his side, squeaking advice.

Another roar, friendly if not enthusiastic, greeted the arrival of Kemp,

who looked a stripling beside the professional. The only time he showed any expression was when he caught sight of Rollison, Chumley and Isobel, sitting on camp stools at the ringside. His gaze was riveted on Isobel, who smiled, then looked away.

'"E ain't gotta chance," someone said, nearby.

"Won't last a round," said another.

'"E don't strip bad," conceded a third, grudgingly.

"Has he done any boxing to speak of?" Chumley asked, leaning across Isobel.

"He says he's done a bit at Oxford," answered Rollison. "I'm told he was in the finals three years running, but he struck good years."

"He can't compete with Billy," Chumley said. "The man's made of rock."

Isobel looked at him sharply, and then turned reproachfully to the Toff.

The fight started ten minutes late, to roars which echoed up and down the street and were taken up by the hundreds who could not gain admission. As they touched hands in the centre of the ring and Billy danced back, agile for a heavyweight, and always surprising his opponents by his footwork, there was a tense, almost a stunned, silence.

Kemp went in with a straight left which shook Billy, and jabbed a right above the heart, stopping a rush. Kemp danced back, and Billy seemed to stand still.

Rollison thought, it's a pity that Kemp's started off so well. Until then, Billy the Bull had been inclined to take the bout lightly, but although his smile remained, there was a wary expression in his eyes; the blows had made him realise that he must not be careless. Kemp knew the ring and did not take chances. He kept out of the way of those long arms, only taking two punches of any weight, and riding them well. He got in a couple to the ribs, which stung but did no damage, and his footwork was good. He managed to keep the fight away from him without making it a dancing match, sparring rather than fighting, but in no way pretentious.

When the gong went, the erstwhile silent crowd let forth; there was a new note in their voices. They knew that they were going to see a real fight, not to gloat over a massacre – for the majority had come to see the complete eclipse of the parson who thought he could punch. The most noticeable change was in the corner where Kemp's friends were sitting. They were eager and almost elated; the whole party seemed to have been relieved of a great burden.

Rollison glanced at Isobel.

"Enjoying it?" he asked.

"You beast!" she said, half-laughing. "I half believe you were right!"

The little man in Billy's corner was shrill and vociferous. Kemp's seconds, including Whiting, behaved as if they could not believe what they had seen, and they settled down to see their man through. Kemp glanced once towards Rollison's corner, and his gaze lingered on Isobel. Then the gong went, and he began to fight well, still keeping out of range of Billy's murderous left swing, which was the punch which had scored most of his knockouts. Kemp

used his feet as if he were remembering the textbook all the time. The round was even.

The change in the temper of the crowd was even more noticeable. Chumley shot a shrewd glance at Rollison, and Isobel sat back as if enjoying herself.

Three rounds of hard fighting followed, with Billy doing most of the attacking but gaining no noticeable advantage, and certainly not gaining ascendancy. Watching closely, Rollison thought that Kemp was beginning to tire; there were red blotches on his fair skin. Billy the Bull showed only one or two, although Kemp had drawn blood first, by a slight cut on Billy's lips. At the start of the sixth round, Billy went in as if he meant to finish it off once and for all. In the first minute, it looked as though he would succeed. He brought out a pace which surprised Kemp, who backed swiftly but could not ride the punches. One of those famous lefts took him on the side of the jaw, and staggered him. The crowd jumped to its feet. How Kemp fended off the follow-up, Rollison did not know. He felt as excited as the others.

Kemp kept the knockout away, but towards the end of the round he was groggy. He staggered into his corner as the gong went.

"That's about it," said Chumley. "But he's put up a damned good show, Rollison."

"He can't lose now!" exclaimed Isobel.

Rollison smiled. "He's not quite finished," he said. "If Billy can keep that up next round, though—" He shrugged and broke off.

Money was already changing hands, for dozens had wagered that the curate would not last halfway through the bout. The odds, although more even, were still on Billy, who remained smiling in his corner, but was breathing with greater deliberation. For the first time, Rollison thought that Kemp might possibly pull it off.

The gong went.

The crowd gasped, for Kemp moved from his corner with unexpected speed and landed two powerful punches on Billy's jaw. Before the man could hit back, he danced away, came in again and jabbed the professional with three straight lefts, each of which pushed Billy's head back. The crowd was on its feet again, Chumley had forgotten himself and was exclaiming: "You've got him! You've got him!"

Isobel stared, her eyes glistening and her hands clenched.

Kemp jabbed again, and the Bull concentrated on keeping away from that waspish left, but left himself open for a right swing; Kemp had not used one before; now, he flashed it round and landed with a crack! which sounded clearly through the hall. Billy staggered, lost his footing, and went down. Kemp backed away and stood with his hands down, unsmiling, but with an expression of contentment which showed his satisfaction.

". . . six – seven," intoned the referee.

On "eight," Billy rose cautiously to his feet.

Had Kemp gone straight in, he might have finished him off, but Kemp waited just too long. What chance he had, was lost in Billy's determined

covering-up, and Chumley shot a meaning glance at Rollison as the round ended.

Isobel said nothing.

"Give you six-ter-four on the parson," muttered a little fellow behind them, one who had been shortening the odds for a long time. "Six-to-four on the parson!"

He hedged when he was taken up by a dozen eager backers of Billy the Bull, and was in the midst of a heated altercation when the gong rang. He sat down and snapped: "Watch the fight, can't yer?"

Rollison smiled, but felt a tenseness which surprised him. If Kemp could repeat his performance of the last round, he would yet beat the professional, but in a few seconds Rollison saw that Kemp had spent himself on his great effort. If Billy had been less wary, he might have made an end to it that round, but he waited until the ninth. A spark of energy came back to Kemp, but as he swung a right which connected too near the end of the swing, he left himself wide open. Billy sent in three killer punches right – left – right! Kemp's mouth sagged, he staggered and bent at the knees.

"Get 'im, Billy!"

"You got 'im, Billy!"

"Don't wait, you fool!"

Billy the Bull, still smiling, stood back from the curate, who tried to pull himself together. He managed to raise his hands, but then crumpled up. There was a tense moment of silence, followed by an uproar which drowned the referee's voice, but Rollison knew it was all over.

The referee turned to Billy the Bull to acclaim him the winner, but Billy stepped past him and went down on one knee beside the curate.

The crowd loved it.

Rollison looked at Isobel and saw a film of tears over her eyes. She fought against them and was smiling when Kem – sitting up in his corner with Billy standing over him and towels flapping – sent another glance towards her.

Rollison put a hand on Isobel's.

"It's all right," he said, "Kemp's paid his entrance fee. Will you come to the dressing room with me?"

"No," she said, hastily, "I must get back, I shouldn't have stayed so long."

"I'll find you an escort," Rollison said. Watching her go, he smiled thoughtfully. Then a man bumped against him and he looked round – to see Keller.

"You damned fool!" Keller growled. "I warned you."

"What's that?" snapped Chumley.

As if he realised that he had made a mistake, Keller turned and was lost in the crowd. Chumley was about to follow him, but drew back.

"What did he say, Rollison? Did he threaten you?"

"It sounded like it," said Rollison, perfunctorily.

"Who was it?"

Rollison hesitated.

"I know you like to go your own way, but there are times when you

can't," Chumley said. "If you know that man, and he's connected with Kemp's trouble, you must tell me his name."

"Perhaps you're right," said Rollison. "But not here – I'll come to the station in about an hour's time."

"All right," said Chumley.

Rollison went through the thinning crowd to the dressing rooms. Kemp was on a table, being pummelled enthusiastically by his seconds, with Whiting standing by and smiling widely. Ebbutt had successfully overcome the handicap of his swollen lips and was smiling as if the world had fallen into his lap, the bald-headed man who had been with Billy the Bull was here, there and everywhere.

Kemp looked at Rollison.

"You'll do," he said drily.

"*We'll* do!" said Rollison.

'What a'baht the gite?" demanded the bald-headed man, shrilly. "What abaht it, Billy-boy; two hundred and forty-nine pounds eight an' thruppence. I dunno 'ow the thruppence come in, must'a been a miscount. That's less tax. Wot about it, Billyboy? Goes to charity, don't it? Charity begins at home, don't it?" He grinned, expectantly.

Billy the Bull came in, with his gay dressing gown tight about him.

"Shut your silly marf, Tike," Billy said, stepping to Kemp's side. "I decided what to do with the gite. That's if Mr. Kemp won't mind assepting it."

Kemp eyed him in surprise.

"It must go to charity," he said. "That was a condition, wasn't it?"

"S'right," said Billy. "You've got a relief fund down at St. Guys, ain't-cher? And you've 'ad a lot o' espense lately—" – Billy the Bull grew tongue-tied, and the others fell silent. "Just seed the management, I 'ave," he went on at last. "They've agreed that they doan want no espenses fer ter-night, so it's all going to charity. Will yer assept it for the church, Mr. Kemp?"

Kemp slid from the table, and held out his hand.

"I will, Billy. It isn't easy to say thanks." His one open eye was smiling, and he seemed to have become much more mature in the past few hours. "I'm afraid I owe you an apology. I once thought you knew something about the damage to the hall. I'm sorry."

"Don't menchon it," said Billy, bluffly. "Only my little joke, I—" He caught Rollison's eye and went on hastily: "I just fought I'd pull your leg, that was all. Never guessed you packed a punch like that. All okey-doke, then?"

"All okey-doke," affirmed Kemp.

"Gawd save the King!" gasped the bald-headed man. "Who'd 'a believed it?"

Rollison left the big hall just after eleven o'clock. It was not quite dark. Two of Ebbutt's men were standing outside, taking no chances. Kemp had been put to bed, with a cold compress over a swollen eye. He had said nothing about Rollison's part in fixing the contest, but obviously he knew.

Rollison smiled, as he remembered the curate's last words. "I suppose you *are* going to do something about Joe Craik, Rolly – or is this reputation of yours just wool-over-the-eyes?"

"I'll try to see him tonight," Rollison had promised.

He was not followed from the hall, but was wary as he walked to the main road and then to the headquarters of A.Z. Division. He had telephoned the flat, but Jolly had not returned, and his curiosity about his man's activities was at fever heat. He showed no sign of that when, at half-past eleven, he was ushered in to Chumley's office. The Inspector looked relieved to see him.

"I was afraid you were going to play one of your tricks, Rollison. Sit down – and have a cigarette? If you'd like a drink?"

"No thanks," said Rollison. "Tricks?" He looked aggrieved. "Now would I ever try to put anything across a policeman?"

Chumley chuckled.

"As a matter of fact, I think you would! What *do* you know about O'Hara's murder?"

"I thought you were sure it was Craik," said Rollison. "We *thought* we had him, all right," said Chumley, looking owlish, "but I'm afraid we made a mistake, Rollison. He's been released."

CHAPTER NINE

The Release Of Joe Craik

"Why did you let him go?" asked Rollison, "Lack of evidence," said Chumley.

"I thought his knife was used."

"It was – but it had been stolen. We caught the man who stole it," Chumley added. "We heard a whisper and went to see him. He denied it, but broke down under questioning. He told us that you had been talking to him – in fact, even allowing for exaggeration, what he said you said is enough to make us reprimand you!"

Rollison sat on the corner of the inspector's desk and lit a cigarette.

"Spike Adams or Harris?" he asked.

"Harris."

"And he admits having picked Craik's pocket?"

"Yes."

"Well, well! He wasn't at the scene of the murder, was he?"

"No," said Chumley, regretfully. "We can't get him for that. He tells a fantastic story of being told that someone else owned the knife, which Craik had stolen – I don't believe a word of it, but I've got to believe the confession, and without evidence that Craik used the knife, I've got nothing on which to hold him."

Rollison smiled drily.

"Now what's amusing you?" asked Chumley.

"A nice piece of fandoogling," said Rollison. "I wondered why you were so careful to let Bray of the Yard detain him, and only finish off yourself. You didn't want to come a cropper, did you? The Yard did the dirty work, you handed Craik over to them."

Chumley grinned, smugly.

"You weren't satisfied that it was Craik even then?" asked Rollison.

"I was not." Chumley was surprisingly emphatic. "I think I know this Division. I've been here for fifteen years, and Joe Craik is one of the reliables. He might have punched O'Hara's head, but he wouldn't use a knife. Young Bray was cocky, so I let him have his head. I thought it might give me a chance to do some quick uncovering, but I've drawn a blank."

"Except that you've been tipped off about the knife," said Rollison. "Who told you?"

"A man who gave his name as Keller," said Chumley, and sat back, as if prepared to gloat over his sensation.

Rollison could not wholly hide his surprise.

"So you think Keller's behind it, do you," said Chumley.

Rollison said nothing.

"Don't be afraid to speak up," urged Chumley. "Rollison, I've not been

asleep for the last six months. I've never talked to Keller, in fact I've only once set eyes on him, but I've had reports about him. There are times when we have to turn a blind eye down here. Keller's associates have the reputation of having committed several ugly crimes, but we've never been able to prove they were Keller's men, or that Keller knew anything about the crimes. It's a remarkable fact that in every case the victims have been—"

"Bad men," said Rollison, unexpectedly. "Swine."

"What's that?"

"I'm just quoting," said Rollison, crossing to an easy chair. He sat on the arm. "There's no evidence against Keller, and the crimes which rumour accredit to him have been—" He shrugged his shoulders. ". . . justifiable. Is that your opinion?"

"No, of course not! But they have been a kind of rough justice. *You* know something about that kind of thing, don't you?"

"It has been said," murmured Rollison. "You seem to be happy about it all, so why ask me to come here?"

"Why are you interested in the murder of O'Hara?" asked Chumley.

"I'm not," answered Rollison. "I'm interested in the affairs of the new curate at St. Guy's."

Chumley rubbed his fleshy chin.

"You're not seriously asking me to believe that?"

"It's the truth," Rollison assured him. "It might lead to other things, of course. For instance, why was Craik's knife stolen? Was it to cast suspicion on Craik, and even provide evidence against him? If so, why?"

"I can't see any other explanation," admitted Chumley, worriedly, "although why anyone should want Craik framed for a murder beats me. Rollison, you've been very active in the past twenty-four hours – surely you know something?"

"I'm a victim of mis-statements," Rollison declared. "Or if you prefer it, I've been selected as a gullible stooge to help someone create the wrong impression. Did Harris tell you who paid him to take Craik's knife?"

"He *said* it was Keller," said Chumley, "and then he described Keller as a stocky man with big brown eyes. Possibly someone has been passing himself off as Keller, who I'm told is a little man, and – great Scott!" exclaimed Chumley. "A stocky man with brown eyes! That fellow who spoke to you at the stadium answers the description – did *you* think he was Keller?"

"He told me he was," said Rollison.

Chumley stared; and then he began to smile.

"And you believed him – I don't think. *That* isn't Keller! He might be the man who has been arranging these attacks, including the wrecking of the mission hall, but he certainly isn't Keller! I wonder why he wants to make out that he is?"

"To establish Keller as a crook, perhaps," said Rollison. "In exactly the same way as he tried to frame Craik. Is that what you think?"

"It seems likely," conceded Chumley. "Why didn't you tell me about the mission hall trouble?"

“Not your battle, yet,” said Rollison. “It’s Kemp’s. But it will probably become yours. Now – to save you from asking why I arranged for Ebbutt to protect the Whiting family – I thought it would help you out as you’re short-staffed! The man who called himself Keller uttered violent threats against the Whitings, to stop Whiting from talking about the stolen knife. As the real Keller appears to have blown the gaff, I doubt if the Whitings are in any danger, so that had better remain one of the things at which you wink a practised eye. Have you anyone in mind for the O’Hara murder?”

“Not yet,” said Chumley.

“Do you know why he was killed?”

“Not yet.”

“Do you know anything about him?”

“Not much,” said Chumley. “He was an Irishman from Eire, one of the many dock workers who came over from there. There’s a sizeable colony of them in Whitechapel. O’Hara was not a leading spirit, in fact rather more timid than most. He’d been in this country about six months. Nothing was known against him, and there’s nothing at his lodgings to suggest a motive. If I didn’t know the cause of the quarrel, I’d say he’d been killed in a drunken brawl.”

“Now you know he was killed so that Craik could be framed,” said Rollison, crisply. “Or don’t you look on it that way?”

“I am inclined to,” said Chumley. “Is that your considered opinion?”

“It’s a considered possibility,” said Rollison. “I wouldn’t put it any higher. You’ll follow up the two lines, I suppose why frame Craik, or if that were incidental, why kill O’Hara?”

“Naturally,” said Chumley. “This brown-eyed man – do you know anything against him?”

“Nothing very much,” said Rollison. “Uttering threats might do as a charge, but – you don’t like making arrests when the accused has to be released for lack of evidence, do you?”

Chumley chuckled. “You won’t forget that for a long time!”

“I shall mark it up against you,” declared Rollison. “You’re slyer than I knew. If you should happen to find out the real name of the brown-eyed gentleman, and cared to tell me, I’d be grateful.”

“I will, provided you undertake to advise me if he does anything which is indictable.”

“I always report indictable offences,” said Rollison, reprovingly. “The days when I carried out trial and sentence myself are gone – and they existed mostly in your imagination!”

He stood up, and Chumley did not press him to stay. Rollison was smiling broadly as he reached the street. Three quarters of an hour later, he let himself into his flat, and the first thing he saw was a light under the kitchen door. He opened it, and made Jolly start.

Jolly wore a white apron over his best clothes, and was operating with a yellow powder which Rollison suspected had something to do with eggs. He also had a frying pan on the electric stove, from which came a smell of

sizzling fat.

"What it is to have an instinct!" approved Rollison. "I only had a bun and a piece of cheese for dinner. Good evening, Jolly. Aren't you tired after your day's journeying?"

"Not exceptionally so, sir, and as you have not had dinner, I will reconstitute a little more egg and make two omelettes. Good evening, sir."

"While reconstituting, you might also reconstruct," said Rollison. "Let's have the diary of a day in the life of one, Jolly."

"I am afraid I have had a disappointing time, sir," said Jolly, mixing powder and water industriously. "At one time I hoped that I would have information of first importance, but I was disappointed. You will remember that when I telephoned you, I left somewhat hurriedly?"

"Yes," said Rollison.

"I saw a man whom I had been following all day," said Jolly. "He had gone into an inn, and I thought he would stay there for a while, but he came out and hurried to a bus, and I thought it better to continue to follow him."

"Who was he?" asked Rollison.

"Not Keller, but his companion, sir."

Thoughtfully, Rollison lit a cigarette.

"Keller isn't Keller, according to my latest information. You mean you followed the owner of the cultured voice?"

"Yes. Are you *sure* the other man is not Keller?" Jolly looked puzzled.

"I'm keeping an open mind," admitted Rollison, "but the police are confident, and Chumley isn't easy to fool."

While Jolly made the omelettes, Rollison told him of the events of the evening. Jolly only occasionally looked up from the frying pan. He had laid a small table in the kitchen for his own supper, and Rollison brought in a chair from the dining room and they ate together. Since Jolly's day had been disappointing, Rollison was anxious to get his own story into the right perspective, and he knew of no better way than discussing it with Jolly.

"And what is your view of Chumley's opinions?" asked the valet, as Rollison finished. "Are they genuine, or are they intended to mislead you?"

"The main problem, yes," said Rollison. "You're good. Jolly, sometimes you're very good. Chumley is showing unsuspected cunning, although he doesn't like being called sly. There always seemed to be something fishy about the detention and arrest, and he was making sure that he didn't take what raps were coming. I don't know Sergeant Bray," added Rollison. "It might do him good to be on the carpet, but it wasn't a friendly thing for Chumley to do."

"On the surface, no, sir," said Jolly, getting up and taking the coffee percolator from the stove.

"But Chumley doesn't stop there," went on Rollison. "He knows that he is in deep waters. Very ingenuously, he wanted my opinion, hoping that I would either prove or disprove his own arguments. I couldn't do either, but he doesn't know that. The curious feature is the identity of Keller."

"Identity, but also character, sir."

"Enlarge on that," invited Rollison.

"As I see it, sir," said Jolly, stirring his coffee, "Keller has built for himself a reputation of being something of a Robin Hood – an avenger, one might say, almost on the lines of your own activities some years ago! He has selected victims who would get no sympathy from the people or the police."

"Good point," admitted Rollison. "Chumley went as far as to say that only rumour links the crimes with Keller. With the arrival of the pseudo-Keller, an explanation dawns. The beatings-up have been done not by the real Keller, but by the impersonator."

"Undoubtedly the situation is very complicated," murmured Jolly.

"Foggy, yes," said Rollison. "But intriguing. Going further and guessing wildly, we might say that (a) the reputation for Keller was deliberately built up by his *vis-a-vis,* that (b) the assaults on the 'swine' were initiated so that when a victim was ready for attack, the police would be reluctant to assume that it was one of the same series, and (c) that it has all been built up with great and admirable cunning, in order to confuse the police, confuse the people, and—"

"Rid the district of Mr. Kemp," Jolly completed.

Rollison did not smile.

"Do you think that's possible?"

"I do, sir. As I listened to you, I came to the conclusion that it is the most likely explanation. I hold no brief for Mr. Kemp, but it is a fact that he has been in the district for six months, that the Keller-crimes, as we may perhaps dub them, have also been in operation for six months. That is right, sir?"

Rollison began to smile.

"I'm glad we think alike. You see where this takes us?"

"If my memory serves me, Mr. Cartwright has been ill for nine or ten months, and he had been without a curate for some months before that," Jolly said. "It is just possible that—"

"Stealing thunder," said Rollison, "but go on."

"Thank you, sir. I was about to say," Jolly went on with gentle reproof, "that as I understand your surmise, between the time that Mr. Cartwright fell ill and the time that Mr. Kemp arrived, some crime, or series of crimes, was planned and put into effect. I do not think that they are necessarily the individual acts of violence. They are more likely to prove something of much greater importance or, perhaps I should say, much greater profit. The arrival of Mr. Kemp made it possible that the crimes would be discovered, and perhaps prevented, so it was decided to get rid of him. Is that your opinion, sir?"

"You know very well it is."

"I certainly share it," said Jolly, warmly. "I must say that I think it a great pity, Mr. Kemp."

"You needn't worry about Kemp," said Rollison, with satisfaction.

"I don't understand you, sir."

"Tonight, he lasted nine rounds against Billy the Bull, and four thousand people saw him. Forty thousand know about it by now. If you're thinking of

going to St. Guy's on Sunday, you'd better reserve a pew!"

"Mr. *Kemp – and* Billy the Bull?" gasped Jolly.

"So you can be surprised," said Rollison, cheerfully.

"But I can't believe it, sir! How could such a contest be arranged? How on earth did Mr. Kemp realise the possibilities of such a – oh, I *see,* sir! You had a hand in it!"

He broke off, and they began to laugh. When they sobered up Jolly told his story.

He had made some fruitless inquiries during the morning, and had then gone to the dockside pub, The Docker, understanding that one of the men whom Rollison had caught the previous night had said that Keller had once lived there. Jolly had seen the man with the cultured voice coming out, and had decided to follow him.

The unknown had gone first to Barking, where he had had lunch in a small coffee shop, and then made his way by bus to Loughton, where he had paid a visit to an inn, then gone from Loughton to Epping, which was not far away. There, he had had a drink at another pub, and visited two more before he had returned, on the last bus, to London. There, the blackout had swallowed him up, near Piccadilly.

"A protracted pub crawl," said Rollison. "But you've made a note of the names of the pubs and other places he called at, I hope?"

"I noted each one down, sir."

"Good!" said Rollison, briefly. "Now to bed, Jolly."

"I hope we are not disturbed, sir," said Jolly. "But for that coffee, I would have had great difficulty in keeping awake." He stifled a yawn, apologised, and asked Rollison what he intended to do the next day.

"In the evening, I hope to see Joe Craik," said Rollison. "Two things to ponder, Jolly. The warning to Kemp was misspelt, a 'here' without its aspirate and other glaring errors, but 'clear' spelt correctly and not with the double-ee which might have been expected. Would a man who knew where to put commas fail to know where to put an 'h'?"

"It isn't likely, sir. It was a further attempt to confuse, perhaps?"

"As with Joe Craik's knife," said Rollison.

He was soon asleep in bed, and was woken up by Jolly at a quarter to eight.

After a long day at the office, without being interrupted by the more pressing affair, he learned from Jolly that no one had telephoned the flat. He went to the East End.

Kemp was in high spirits when he arrived, and appeared to regard him as a worker of miracles.

"Because Craik's been released?" asked Rollison. "Don't thank me, thank the police. What kind of a day have you had?"

Kemp, his one open eye bright, drew in his breath.

"The whole atmosphere has changed. I haven't seen so many smiles or been asked how I am, so often in all my life! Now that *is* a miracle, Rolly, and you can't deny that you're responsible for it! I know you fixed the fight

with Billy the Bull; I wish I could say thanks."

Rollison eyed him reflectively.

"Odd fellow," he announced, after a pause. "I don't work miracles. Nor do you. But they happen. Curious, isn't it? Now I'm going to see Joe Craik!"

He left Kemp staring with a startled expression, and walked along towards Craik's shop. On the way, a large number of people hailed him.

Outside Craik's shop, a little woman was tapping at the door. Looking round at Rollison, she said: "S'funny thing, 'e *said* 'e'd be open until seven o'clock. It's funny. Joe don't orfen let yer down."

She tapped again, but got no response. Rollison's smile faded and he stood back, the better to survey the shop, and to see the closed first floor windows above the weather-beaten facia board across which was written *'Joe Craik, Groceries, Provisions'*. The shop windows were freshly dressed with tins of goods on points, all carefully docketed, and it was impossible to see inside the shop.

"I don't know that I like this," said Rollison. "Does he live on his own?"

"Yerse."

"What about his wife?"

'"E'd be a long way from 'ere if 'e lived wiv 'er," declared the woman with a wide grin. "She's bin dead these ten years, mister! 'ere! Wotcher doing?"

He could smell gas coming from above his head; it was too strong for him to be mistaken.

Rollison hunched a shoulder and thrust it against the glass panel of the shop door, which was pasted over with advertising bills. After three attempts, the glass broke. Rollison ignored the curious glances of passers-by, who promptly became spectators, as he removed a large piece of glass, and put his hand inside and opened the door.

As he stepped inside, a uniformed constable came up.

CHAPTER TEN

Joe Craik In Person

No one was in the shop.

There was a smell of bacon and fat, although everything looked scrupulously clean, and the floor was covered with sawdust. Goods were piled high on the shelves, neatly ticketed. Rollison glanced round and then looked behind the counters.

The constable came in.

"What—" he began, and then recognised Rollison. "I say, sir!" he exclaimed.

Rollison smiled at him fleetingly.

"I'm looking for Craik," he said, opening a door which led to an over-furnished, drably decorated parlour. This was empty, too. He went through into the kitchen, but no one was there.

The stairs led from a tiny passage between the shop and the parlour. Rollison mounted the stairs quickly but hesitated when he reached the landing. There were three doors, all closed.

From one there came the strong smell of gas.

Rollison looked into the empty rooms, before finding that the third door was locked. It was a thin, freshly painted one, with a brass handle. Rollison put his shoulder against it, and heaved; it was easy to break open. As he staggered forward, the smell of gas was very strong.

"You all right up there, sir?" called the constable.

"Yes!" gasped Rollison, stifling a cough. He hurried across the room, holding his breath, and caught a glimpse of the man on the bed; frightened eyes stared at him. He flung up the one, large window and drew in a deep breath of fresh air.

A crowd had gathered outside and some were standing on the opposite side of the road, gazing at the place.

He turned round; the man on the bed held a length of rubbing tubing in his hand and from it there came the faint hiss of escaping gas. Rollison saw that the other end of the tube was connected with the gas bracket. He reached up and turned it off. The little, frightened eyes watched every movement; Joe Craik reminded him of nothing more than a scared rabbit.

Rollison reached his side, making him cringe back, and lifted him from the bed, saying in a low voice: "Keep quiet, if you want to stop a scandal."

Craik muttered something that was inaudible.

Rollison kicked a chair into position and sat the man on it in front of the window – he could not be seen from outside.

"Stay there," exhorted Rollison.

He went into the other bedroom and opened the windows, then went

downstairs. The policeman had his hands full, for two urchins were standing and grinning at him, one of them holding a tin of beans in grubby hands. Three people had entered the shop in addition to the woman, and dozens of curious faces peered through the doorw"Put it down, and be off with you!" the policeman said to the child. "Is it all right upstairs, sir?"

The boy dropped the tin close enough to the constable's foot, to make him step back, then turned and ran, with his companion. At the door, one of them put his tongue out, and the other drew his hand from beneath his jersey and exhibited a second tin before tearing off. There was a roar of laughter from the crowd.

"Well, then, *I'll* 'elp meself!" declared the woman.

"No, you don't," said the policeman.

"My ole man—" she began.

"Yes, it's all right," said Rollison interrupting, "Craik had a heart spasm, but he's got some tablets and he's all right now. It's just as well we came." He stressed the 'we'.

"Oh, that's good." The constable began to deal with the crowd, helped by two colleagues who soon arrived.

There was no smell of gas in the shop, but Rollison could detect it at the foot of the stairs. He went into the stuffy parlour and opened the window and the door. In the shop again, he saw Kemp, still in an open-necked shirt and flannels, and with his left eye less swollen.

"Is it all right for me to come in?"

"Oh, yes," said Rollison, and Kemp joined him. "Don't talk." He said nothing more until they were halfway up the stairs. Then he looked round at Kemp with a wry smile. "Craik tried to gas himself, but I think I've satisfied the police that it was a heart attack. Can you smell gas?"

"Now you come to mention it, yes." Kemp looked hard at Rollison but said nothing until they reached the bedroom.

Craik was looking over his shoulder, and when he saw Kemp, he tried to get up.

"Don't get up, Joe," said Kemp. "And don't worry – Mr. Rollison has told everyone you had a heart attack."

He closed the door.

Rollison disconnected the rubber tubing and coiled it round his fingers. The room was spotlessly clean, but the wainscotting had been broken in several places, and one stretch had recently been replaced by newer, lighter-brown wood. He looked at it thoughtfully, hearing Joe Craik's voice as if from a long way off. The man talked in a monotonous, frightened undertone as Kemp pulled up another chair and sat beside him.

"I couldn't bear it, Mr. Kemp. The disgrace, the horrible disgrace!" He shuddered. "I've never been so much as inside a police station before, and to be charged with – with *murder."*

"But you were released," Kemp said.

"You – you don't know the people around here, sir. They'll say I did it. I daren't show my face in church again – oh, why didn't he let me do away

with myself?"

He turned and looked at Rollison.

"Why didn't you? What did you want to interfere for?" He tried to get to his feet. His eyes were filled with tears, his face was twisted like a baby's, and his lips were quivering. "A man's got a right to do what he likes with his own life!"

Kemp said: "You'll feel better soon, Joe. I'll go and make you a cup of tea."

"I – I won't never be able to lift me head again," moaned Craik. "I'd be better out of the way."

"Do you want everyone to think you killed O'Hara?" demanded Rollison, as Kemp stood up.

"It wouldn't make no difference to me, if I was dead!"

Rollison glanced at Kemp, who nodded, and went downstairs. Craik continued to stare into Rollison's eyes, his own still watering and his body atremble. Rollison turned to the wall, went down on one knee, and was touching the wainscotting when Craik gasped: "What do you think you're doing?"

Rollison pulled at the new piece of wainscotting; it came away easily. He groped inside the hole which lay revealed, and touched smooth and cold. He drew out two bottles, and stood up, holding one in each hand.

Craik rose unsteadily to his feet.

"Don't – don't tell the curate, Mr. Rollison!" His voice seemed strangled. "Don't tell 'im!" His voice grew almost hysterical, but could not be heard outside the room. "I – I never used to touch it, only since my wife died – I been so lonely. You don't know what it is to be lonely; I don't drink much, only a little drop now and again."

"I won't tell Kemp," said Rollison, quietly. "What is it?" The bottles were clean, and had no labels.

"Whisky," said Craik. "You – you promise you won't?"

"Yes," said Rollison, but made a mental reservation. "You're all kinds of a damned fool, Craik. Not a soul would have believed you were innocent." When Craik said nothing, Rollison went on sharply: "Why did you try to gas yourself?"

"I – I was so ashamed," muttered Craik. "Me, a respectable man, a member o' the church – you don't know the disgrace, Mr. Rollison. As soon as I come back, everyone started saying I was a sly one, why, two men come in and congratulated me on getting away with it!"

"Did you kill O'Hara?" asked Rollison, abruptly.

The man's eyes widened in horror.

"Me!" He gasped. "No, no, Mr. Rollison, I never killed him, I never killed a man in my life! He was a dirty tyke in some ways, always goin' on at me, but I—"

"So you knew him," murmured Rollison.

Apparently the shop was empty, and the crowd had been moved on, for there were only the sounds of chinking crockery downstairs. In the bedroom,

the silence lengthened, and Craik had gone very still.

At last, he said: “I bought the whisky from him, Mr. Rollison. That’s why he always had a rub at me. I didn’t know from one day to another when he was going to give me away, it was something awful. But – I never killed him! I didn’t even know I was going to see him that night!”

“Do the police know about your dealings with him?” asked Rollison.

Craik’s expression was answer enough.

“All right, I won’t tell them,” Rollison said, but again he made a mental reservation he would not tell them unless it became important evidence. He listened, but Kemp did not appear to be coming up. He unscrewed the cap of one bottle, and smelt it. His face wrinkled.

“Great Scott! It’s poison!”

“It – it isn’t so good as it was,” muttered Craik. “But whisky’s hard to get, Mr. Rollison. Don’t – don’t let the curate know, please!”

Kemp’s footsteps sounded on the stairs.

Rollison replaced the bottles and the stretch of wainscotting, and was standing up, empty-handed, when Kemp arrived with a tea-tray. He had brought three cups.

The tea seemed to revive Craik. He remained maudlin and apologetic, and very humble. He said that he realised now that the suicide attempt had been wrong, but he hadn’t thought he could stand the disgrace. Kemp jollied him, handling the situation, as he knew it, admirably. Half-an-hour later, Craik seemed a new man, and Kemp rose to go.

“You’ll be all right, now, Joe, and I’ve a meeting at seven-thirty. Don’t come out tonight. But don’t talk a lot of nonsense about not coming to church!” He rested a hand on the man’s shoulder. “Are you coming, Rolly?”

“I’ll stay for half-an-hour,” said Rollison.

When Kemp had gone, Craik looked at him steadily.

Bill Ebbutt had disliked the little man’s face, and that was understandable. Craik had a hang-dog look, as if he were ashamed of himself. It was meekness but not true humility. He would be anathema to a bluff, confident character like Ebbutt. Now, however, he took on a strange, unexpected dignity.

“I appreciate your help very much, Mr. Rollison. I won’t forget it, either.”

Rollison smiled.

“That’s all right, Joe! It’s none of my business, but if you must drink in secret, don’t drink poison like that.” He took out the bottles again and tucked them into his pockets, where they bulged noticeably. “If you must have a drink, I’ll send you a bottle of the real stuff.”

“Please don’t,” said Craik, quickly. “This has been a lesson to me, I must try to—”

“If you try to reform yourself in five minutes, you’ll slip back further than you were before,” said Rollison. “How long have you been buying this stuff from O’Hara?”

“About four months, I suppose,” said Craik.

“Who did you get it from before that?”

“Another Kelly,” said Craik. “I mean, another Irishman!”

“Do you know where they got it?”

“No, I – I didn’t ask questions,” said Craik, and went on in a thin voice: “I knew I was doing wrong. But I couldn’t get it no other way. I used to buy it in the West End, but when it got short I couldn’t.”

“It’s your problem,” Rollison said. “I’m not your judge. Do you know anyone else who buys it?”

“No,” said Craik, emphatically. “No one knows about it.”

“Then why should they learn?” asked Rollison.

He smiled, and left the room.

Someone was putting a piece of board up at the broken window. It was the policeman, who appeared to inquire about Craik’s condition, and said that two or three things had been stolen when a dozen people had burst into the shop.

“I think it was them kids,” the policeman said. “They take some handling!”

“If they all get handled your way, they’ll be all right,” said Rollison. “I shouldn’t worry Craik just now. He’ll be better tomorrow.”

“What about the door?” asked the policeman.

“We’ll lock it, and go out the back way,” said Rollison. “The back door’s got a self-locking Yale.”

When he parted company with the policeman he walked towards the Whitechapel Road, no longer smiling. The bottles were uncomfortable against his sides, and once or twice he fingered them.

He did not think he had much further to look for the motive behind the murder; and he came to the conclusion that Jolly had not wasted the previous day. He was very anxious to talk to Jolly.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

"Very Poor Stuff," Say Jolly

Jolly sipped at a glass of Joe Craik's whisky gingerly, ran it about his mouth, and swallowed. Despite his caution, he choked. When he had recovered, he looked at Rollison with watery eyes.

"Very harsh liquor indeed, sir."

"So I think," said Rollison. "Craik bought it from O'Hara, and before O'Hara, from another Irishman from the colony at the docks. Bootleg liquor, Jolly!"

"You seem almost elated, sir." Jolly was mildly disapproving. "I am," said Rollison. "We've won half the battle, and your journey yesterday was a stroke of genius!"

Jolly looked puzzled.

"Can't you see why?" asked Rollison.

"I'm afraid I can't, sir."

"You've been drinking too much firewater! You followed the pseudo-Keller's cultured companion about yesterday, didn't you? And as far as you know, he didn't realise that he was being followed."

"I should be very reluctant to think that he had observed me," said Jolly, with dignity.

"I don't think he did, otherwise he wouldn't have gone round booking orders," said Rollison.

"Booking *orders* for what?" echoed Jolly. "I must be very obtuse, or – oh, I see, sir!" His eyes grew brighter, and took on an eager look. "Would you care to elaborate the point, sir?"

Rollison chuckled.

"Making sure you don't steal my thunder this time? Yes, I'll elaborate. The man with the cultured voice went to the various pubs and booked orders for the hooch. His voice would go a long way, and he would be a plausible salesman. He made nine calls altogether, and if he sold a couple of dozen bottles each time, he didn't do so badly. That would explain why he made it a pub crawl under difficulties. We should have suspected something like it last night."

"We were both very tired," murmured Jolly.

"Yes. Well, where do we go from here?" When Jolly did not answer, Rollison went on in a thoughtful voice: "We are justified in making some guesses. Kemp told me he is re-opening some of the mission halls which have been closed up for some time. After all, the mob would have to keep the stuff somewhere, wouldn't it?"

"Naturally, sir."

"Why not in or beneath one of the mission halls which haven't been used for some time. A search is indicated! I wish I could get a few days off."

"Perhaps it is time for you to fall sick, sir," murmured Jolly. "We'll see. Meanwhile, I don't think we should move too fast. You've got one of the men who matters, the salesman of the outfit. You'd better pick up his trail again – you didn't find out his name, did you?"

"No, sir," said Jolly, apologetically.

"You might find out from Bill Ebbutt," said Rollison. "You told me that your man finished his rounds in the West End, although he started from the East End. There would be a useful market for firewater in the mushroom clubs, even more so than in suburban pubs."

"A much readier one, sir, yes."

"Find him and keep after him, but be careful," urged Rollison. "If they realise we're after them in earnest, they might get really nasty. If they murdered O'Hara, who obviously talked too freely for their safety, they'll do anything."

"Do you think that's why he was murdered?"

"Probably. He couldn't resist baiting Craik, which was foolish. Craik made out that he started the fight because he was anxious to defend the fair name of Ronald Kemp, but actually he was keyed up to a pitch of desperation because he was afraid that O'Hara would taunt him, and let Whiting know what was behind it. It looks as if we're getting along very nicely! Bill Ebbutt was right in his estimate of Joe Craik."

"And that was, sir?"

"Bill doesn't like hypocrites," said Rollison.

"Craik certainly doesn't impress as a very sincere individual," murmured Jolly. "Perhaps you have already seen the other possibility, sir?"

"What possibility?"

Jolly looked diffident, and coughed slightly, before saying: "I have not had the advantage of seeing Craik in person, but he did discover that this whisky was available, didn't he? He usually bought his supplies in the West End, but switched to the East End. The question I ask myself is, how did he know about it? A chance meeting with O'Hara, or any one of the salesmen, would hardly have brought to light the fact that they were selling illicit liquor. Craik's reputation being what it was, he was not a likely informer. Don't you agree, sir?" added Jolly, anxiously; for the Toff was looking at him fixedly.

"I do indeed," murmured Rollison. "I'd missed that one. Craik might know where the stuff is being stored. He might even be conniving at it."

"It occurred to me as being *just* possible, sir," said Jolly, modestly.

"It strikes me as being probable," declared Rollison. "Nice fellow, Joe Craik – if we're right." He glanced at his watch. "It's getting on for nine. I'll go over and find these halls, and any other places which belong to the church and might be used for warehousing. You can try to find out the name of our cultured gentleman. Oh – and see that Craik gets a bottle of real Scotch."

"Very good, sir."

"There's one other thing," went on Rollison, rubbing his cheek

thoughtfully. “The order of the day is – be careful.”

“I will, sir.”

“When you look blank like that, you’re usually wondering what I’m talking about,” said Rollison. “I’m not drivelling. Care is essential. Even if we’re right, we haven’t yet discovered where the stuff comes from. The Irish angle might be a blind – these gentry are specialists in diversions, aren’t they? But Jolly, if we’re right – how big *is* it?”

After a pause, Jolly said warmly: “I didn’t see as far as you, sir. We might close up the traffic in Whitechapel, or even further around, but still leave a very wide field for its disposal.”

“Yes,” said Rollison, “and we might as well make a clean sweep of it.” He lit a cigarette. “As it might be a big-money game, take even fewer chances than you would have done five minutes ago.”

“Is there any particular thing you want me to find out about my quarry?”

“Name, address – oh, yes,” said Rollison, “and what connections he has in the West End. Big money isn’t often found in the East End.”

He paused, and Jolly waited, hopefully.

“There have been whisky rackets before, haven’t there?” murmured Rollison. “Two or three of them dummy companies selling good stuff at high prices. Could we be on the fringe of something similar, but with hooch as its stock-in-trade?”

“It is at least a possibility, sir,” said Jolly. “I have just remembered something which the man who called himself Keller said when he called last night.”

“What particular thing?” asked Rollison.

“He recommended you to play around in your own back yard, and made it clear that he meant the West End.”

Rollison began to smile.

“Jolly, we’ll have to go into formal partnership! I missed that.”

“I am quite satisfied with the present arrangement, sir, thank you,” said Jolly, primly. “I cannot see that it is of any great importance, although it might—”

“Oh, come!” exclaimed Rollison. “It might be the most important thing yet.”

“I don’t quite see—” began Jolly.

“But you must see,” declared Rollison, “Keller – we’ll call him Keller – was anxious that we shouldn’t spend too much time on his beat. He doesn’t know just what we have discovered. He might even have been referring, obliquely, to the hooch. He might have been saying, in effect: ‘Why spoil our little market, when there’s a big one on your own doorstep?’ Remember,” added Rollison, “there is the real Keller, of the established reputation. Two factions, as we know. What a triumph for our Keller if he succeeded in making us concentrate on the other man.”

“Very subtle indeed, sir,” said Jolly. “I really don’t know how you do it! What time do you expect to be back?”

“I hope, by midnight,” said Rollison.

He let Jolly go ahead, reassuring himself that neither he nor his man was being followed. He came to the conclusion that 'Keller' had been sincere when he had offered a forty-eight hours armistice, and he went by tube to Whitechapel. When he reached the Jupe Street hall, he found it closed. He went to St. Guy's, which was half-a-mile away, but found it empty as well – it was used as a school during the day. He was about to go back to Jupe Street when a side door of the church opened, and Craik appeared.

"Why, hallo, sir!" he said, with enforced joviality. "I didn't expect to see you again this evening!"

"One never knows one's luck, does one?" said the Toff, ironically. "Have you seen Mr. Kemp?"

"He was here a short while ago, but went out. I understand that you might find him near East Wharf. We have a small hut near there, sir."

Did the man look furtive? Rollison asked himself, and decided that Craik's rabbity eyes held no particular expression unless it was of guilt. His drooping lips were set in a smile.

"I'll look there," promised Rollison, and went off.

Craik stood watching him until he was out of sight, and thus increased Rollison's sense of misgiving. He reached East Wharf, which was large and bustled with activity. A ship was being unloaded, and sweating dockers were at the cranes and the pulleys, at hand-barrows and on electric trucks. The roar of engines and the loud voices of the men echoed across the water.

Rollison stood watching for a few minutes.

Many of the voices were clearly Irish; the rich brogue would have fascinated him in any case, and just now was exceptionally interesting. He watched some wooden packing cases being swung ashore, with two men beneath to steady and direct them to a great pile. Most of the men were stripped to the waist, or wore only singlets and trousers, and many were barefooted. One little party was singing a folksong, and the harmony was curiously affecting.

"Could there be a crate or two of hooch there, I wonder?" mused Rollison, as he turned away.

He did not know where to find the St. Guy's hut – he expected that it was one which had been erected to serve the dockers, perhaps as a canteen or a clothes depot, and was now out of use because the W.V.S. had taken over that work. Looking about him at the sweating, singing men, he reflected that Isobel Crayne would have been horrified, only a few years before, at the very thought of spending much of her time amid such people and surroundings.

Then he saw the mobile canteen, and smiled when he saw Kemp standing outside it – talking with Isobel.

"He's no slouch," murmured Rollison, and sauntered towards them. Isobel saw him first.

"Hallo, Rolly! We were just talking about you!"

"There is a law of slander," said Rollison. "And I'm jealous of my reputation."

“We weren’t doing it any harm,” said Kemp.

“If you were, I would close up your other eye,” said Rollison. “Shocking, these fighting parsons, aren’t they?” he asked Isobel. “You never know whether you’re going to get a homily or a punch on the nose. Don’t let him take you away, he’ll talk for hours.”

Kemp grinned.

“This is Miss Crayne’s half-hour off!”

“Have you discovered that already?” murmured Rollison. “You’re going to quicken the pace in these parts. When is the half-hour up? Because I have much to discuss with you, and—”

“Hoy, there!”

A stentorian voice broke across his words, and made all of them look up sharply. A dozen men bellowed in warning. All were staring towards the trio, while a great bale of wooden cases enclosed in a rope-net, came swinging towards them, as if out of control.

CHAPTER TWELVE

The Apologetic Crane Driver

Rollison swept his right arm round, knocking Isobel into Kemp, who lost his balance and fell heavily, with Isobel on top of him. Rollison went flat on his stomach. He saw the load sweeping nearer and dropping fast. He drew in his breath and kept still.

The bale crashed.

He felt something strike the back of his leg, and heard the crates breaking open; but little debris flew about, for the net kept all but the smaller pieces in. The crash had made the cement ground quiver, made blast enough to take Rollison's breath away, but he straightened up, wincing when he moved his right leg. He saw Isobel beginning to get up, bewilderedly; her dark hair had fallen over her eyes. Kemp had one arm about her, and although he was still on his back, he was looking about.

Rollison twisted round so that he could see his leg. The trouser-leg was torn slightly and there was a small streak of blood, but he did not think it was serious; a piece of broken wood lay near him.

He stood up and helped Isobel, as a dozen men hurried towards them.

Not far away, a man with a pronounced Irish brogue said loudly: "Always aslape; I've never known a country where the people slape so much!" He spoke insultingly to a big sweaty docker, who glowered at him.

"Keep your trap shut, Kelly."

Out of the corner of his eye, Rollison saw the Irishman stop suddenly, then swing round and aim a blow at the docker's head. On the instant, men began to fight. Two were bowled over, by the big Irishman, who was landing right and left. Others joined him and stood together, breathing defiance.

A little, dark-haired man, better dressed than most of the others, who had been approaching Rollison, roared: "Stop that fighting!"

No one took the slightest notice.

"Strike me, I'll see the lot of you in jail if—" roared the little man, and plunged into the middle of the fray. He did not use his fists, but pushed and shoved and shouted, and out of the melee there came some sort of order. Before long, the combatants had separated and were standing away from each other. The Irish were grinning widely and there seemed to be no malice in the others.

The little dark-haired man gave orders and some of the dockers, from both sections, went towards an empty lorry and began to load it with wooden crates. Only a few of the men had restarted work, however, but Rollison paid little attention to that. He answered questions reassuringly, for no great harm had been done. He smiled at the dark-haired man and at the English and the Irish working together in what now appeared to be perfect

harmony.

A disruptive note was introduced by the lorry driver.

"Now then, don't knock me lorry apart, Irish!"

"That's enough, Straker!" snapped the dark-haired man.

"Me name's Smith," said the lorry driver, truculently.

Rollison would have paid little attention to the exchange but for his interest in the dark-haired man, who had shown himself so capable of handling an ugly situation.

"Your name doesn't matter a stripe to me," he growled. "You work for Straker. Don't start more trouble on this wharf. If you do, I'll report you right away."

"All right, all right," growled the driver. "Can't yer take a joke?" He lit a cigarette, and went slouching off to the front of his lorry.

Two scared-looking women in the green dress of W.V.S. workers came from the mobile canteen.

"Are you really all right?" Rollison asked Isobel.

"I'm scared, that's all."

"Accidents will happen," said Rollison, "we were in luck's way".

No one had been seriously hurt, although the fence of a wooden hut, standing near, was down. A few pieces of machinery were strewn about the wharf, small parts from the packing cases; Rollison was almost disappointed because there were no broken whisky bottles. He waited until Kemp was dusting himself down and a plump little woman came out with two cups of tea, before turning to the dark-haired man.

"Are you in charge?" he asked.

"Yes. I'm the foreman." The man was abrupt.

"I'd like a word with that crane driver."

"So would I!" said the foreman, darkly. "Are you sure that cut doesn't need attention, Mr. Rollison?"

"I'll see to it later." Rollison passed no comment on the fact that he had been recognised, but went with the foreman towards the crane. It was drooping towards the ground, as if something had broken, and a man was climbing from its smelly interior. Small and pale-faced, he reminded Rollison of Craik, but was young enough to be Craik's son.

"What the hell are you doing? I thought you were a crane driver, not a. . ." He went on with unprintables, a flow which showed a nice discrimination and made the driver's lips quiver. Several other men gathered round. In different circumstances, Rollison would have been sorry for the little man.

At last, the foreman stopped.

"I – I – I'm sorry, sir," gasped the driver, in a small voice. "I misjudged the distance and tried to swing it back. Then my hand slipped."

"Slipped? Mine'll slip where you don't want it, you bloody lunatic!" roared the foreman. "I'm always telling you to keep your eyes on your job, and to stop going to sleep. This'll be your last ride in a crane," he added. "I'll see you off this wharf if I have to drive the thing myself!"

"I – I'm sorry," muttered the crane driver. He looked at Rollison. "You –

you wasn't – no one was hurt, was they?"

"You nearly broke this gentleman's leg," rasped the foreman, "and for all you cared, you might have knocked their brains out."

The apologetic crane driver could not keep still, evaded the foreman's eyes as well as Rollison's. Once or twice, he put an unsteady hand to his lips, and his eyes were suspiciously bright.

"Knock off now, and go to my office!" snapped the foreman. As the man turned to go, and a path was made for him through the crowd, the foreman looked up like a bantam cock and roared: "What in hades do you loafing varmints think you're doing? Do we want that ship unloaded or don't we? Double time – why, before I pay you double time for behaving like a crowd of village idiots, I'll burn my shirt!"

The curious threat was effective, for the men turned away and work started again. A small party had already taken the broken goods from the net and the foreman himself went to the crane and manoeuvred skilfully until it was in its proper position and the empty net was over the hold of the ship. Rollison watched him with close interest. The smelly, oily fumes were nauseating, and the number of buttons and levers were confusing, but the foreman had a sure touch.

He finished, and jumped down.

"Take it over, Smith," he said to an oldish man standing by. "It's time they left this job to men."

"How old is the driver?" Rollison asked.

"About twenty," said the foreman. "Only he isn't a driver anymore."

"What's his name?" asked Rollison.

"Cobbett."

"And there's nothing mechanically wrong with the crane?"

"No. The fool overshot the mark and pressed the wrong button, lowering it instead of taking it back – my stripes, Mr. Rollison, I had the wind up! I thought you were all done for!"

"No great harm done, except to the goods," said Rollison. "Are they all the same?"

"No, it's a mixed cargo," said the foreman. "I wouldn't care if it had been a bale of feather pillows, he shouldn't have lost his head."

"Do you know him well?"

"Not so well as I know some of them," said the foreman, and looked squarely into Rollison's face. "What are you getting at, Mr. Rollison?"

"If you've worked here for long, you've probably heard that the new curate isn't popular," said Rollison.

The foreman grinned.

"Didn't you see that fight last night. But of course you did, I saw you at the ring-side – my stripes, what a fight and what a fighter! Pity he took the cloth, he might have been a British hope!"

"You haven't quite followed me by the way; I didn't get your name?"

"Owen. Jake Owen," said the foreman. "Where haven't I followed you?"

"Kemp still isn't popular in certain quarters," said Rollison. "I think there

have been attacks on his life."

Owen's lips tightened, and for some seconds he just stared.

Then: "You mean Cobbett did it on purpose?"

"I mean, he might have done."

"I'll soon find out," growled Owen, and turned on his heel, his face livid. Rollison stopped him.

"It's better not to voice suspicions at this stage, we might be wrong," he said quietly. "Even if we're right, I don't think we should say so yet. We've plenty of reasons for making inquiries about Cobbett, without saying why. I'm taking you on trust," he added with an apologetic smile.

"If you say I'm to keep my mouth shut, I'll keep it shut," growled Owen. "I don't want any filthy murderers working on my shift."

"Good! Can you stand Cobbett off for a day or two?"

"That'll only give him a rest, the lazy young—"

"He might go places," murmured Rollison, "and I'd rather like to find out where."

Owen was very quick in the uptake.

"I get you! You like to do things your own way, don't you?"

"The right way, when I see it," said Rollison. "Thanks." He obtained Cobbett's address before he left Owen, who went to the little office to interview the crane driver. Rollison returned to the W.V.S. canteen. Kemp was standing by it; Isobel was serving tea and sandwiches to men who were having a break. The sun was getting lower and the first shadows of evening were over the docks, bathing the distant side of the river in a mellow, softening light, which took away the ugliness of brick buildings and cranes and barges, and even hid the skeleton shapes of two warehouses which had been destroyed by fire during heavy raids.

Kemp was looking sombre.

"What can I do with her?" he demanded, as Rollison drew up. "She won't give it up for tonight and go home."

Rollison smiled. "Nor would you, in the circumstances."

"It must have given her a whale of a shock."

"It did me but I'm not going home," said Rollison. "I've a story that will interest you," he added. "Isobel won't mind if you come with me – will you?"

Isobel reassured him, and seemed eager to demonstrate that she could still serve two cups of tea to another woman's one. Rollison refused a cup, and left with Kemp. Rollison glanced round after going a few yards, and saw Isobel staring after them, a cup of tea in her hand.

Rollison smothered a grin.

At the Jupe Street hall, he gave Kemp an outline of his suspicions, but he did not mention Craik's part in helping him to form them, nor did he go into details. He finished: "If I'm right, then the stuff is being stored somewhere near."

"Do you think one of the church halls is being used?" said Kemp, slowly.

"It wouldn't surprise me."

“We’ve three that haven’t been used for some time. Do you want to search them?”

“Not yet,” decided Rollison. “I think it had better wait – I’ll have someone keep an eye on them, though. You don’t let them out, do you?”

“No. They’re only wooden huts. Mr. Cartwright believed in getting out among the people; he thought it easier than trying to persuade them to walk as far as St. Guy’s.”

“There isn’t much wrong with Cartwright’s reasoning,” said Rollison.

“It would just about finish him, if he learned about this,” said Kemp, grimly.

Rollison looked his amazement.

“Finish Cartwright? Not on your life! He’d want to get out of bed and be after them with an axe!”

Kemp looked startled.

“Perhaps you’re right. I—” He stopped abruptly, with his mouth parted and his puffy eye opened. Rollison watched him, not surprised at the sudden change, and knowing that sooner or later one possibility would occur to Kemp.

“Look here!” exclaimed the curate, “was that accident with the crane really an accident? Or—”

“Or, I think,” answered Rollison, “they know that they haven’t a chance of driving you out, and they’re getting desperate. Accidents will happen,” he repeated, ironically. “They won’t want to work up police interest by straightforward murder. The police didn’t go so wild over the murder of O’Hara as they would over the Rev. Ronald Kemp. Watch your step – literally.”

Kemp began to rub his hands together slowly, and his good eye began to glisten.

Rollison made a note of the sites of the halls and then went round to Bill’s gymnasium, which he found packed, and where he was greeted with great affability. Soon after he arrived, six men departed with instructions to watch the three halls in couples, from a safe distance, and to report any visits by night or day. Then Rollison mentioned, casually, that he had been served with some pretty potent whisky earlier in the evening.

“There’s some raw stuff about,” declared Bill Ebbutt. “You should ‘ave stayed thirsty until you arrived ‘ere, Mr. Ar. – I don’t sell poison.” He grinned as well as he could. His face was a mass of bruises, black and blue and purple, and he was obviously in great discomfort. “How’s the Rev?”

“A black eye apart, he’s all right.”

“Bless ‘is heart! Will you ‘ave a drink?” asked Ebbutt.

“No, thanks, that one was enough for tonight!” Rollison shuddered, realistically. “Is much hooch sold?”

“There’s been one or two fellers in pitchin’ the tale – you know ‘ow it goes. They’ve got ‘old of a few dozen bottles orf someone who’s gone bankrupt – but if you bought the stuff, you’d soon go broke all right! The samples is all right, sunnines, sunnines they gives you a spot’ve the real

poison."

"Can you remember any of the salesmen?"

Bill Ebbutt began to toy with his fleshy jowl. In a very sober voice, he answered: "Maybe I could. Are you on to sunnink?"

"I might be, but I don't want your boys to know about it."

"S'very thoughtful of yer," said Ebbutt. "Very thoughtful indeed. Bootleg liquor, is it? It could be big." He closed his eyes in an effort to recall who had tried to sell him the stuff, and finally opened them and said hurriedly: "One was a little Irish feller, a proper Kelly. I dunno his name. The other was one o' these eddicated types, all smiles. I soon sent 'im off wiv' a flea in 'is ear. Tell yer what, Mr. Ar. – if anyone else comes peddling it, I'll buy a dozen an' see what I can find out."

"Good idea, Bill!" said Rollison. "This educated fellow – what was he like?"

"Tall as you are – dark suit – good looker – clean shaved – round erbaht – thirty-five. That do yer, Mr. Ar.?"

"Wonderful!" said Rollison. "You've described the man I have in mind. Have you seen him about lately?"

"Nope."

"Will you find out if he's been to any of the other pubs?"

"Yep. If they've bought the stuff, they won't talk – if they 'aven't, they'll tell me."

The description of 'Keller's' educated companion clinched one thing; the gang was peddling illicit whisky. From the taste of Craik's sample, Rollison thought it was probably made from illicit stills. There was a great deal of similar stuff on sale, especially at the flashier clubs, and members of the armed services bought more of it than anyone else.

"I think it's time I saw the Yard," Rollison decided, standing on a corner and watching the trams pass by, noisy yet ghostly with their faint lights. There were very few cars or other vehicles, except an occasional bus. He strolled towards Whitechapel Station, and as he neared it, a taxi began to move from the curb.

Rollison hailed it, quickly. The driver pulled up.

"Where to?" he demanded. "I'm on me way to me garage, can't go far."

"Scotland Yard," ordered Rollison.

The pavement was filled with people walking slowly to and fro, and some of the shadows seemed to be sinister. He did not think he had been followed, but if he had, then 'Keller' would soon know where he was going.

The interior of the cab was very dark and the driver started off too soon.

"Be careful!" exclaimed Rollison – and then stopped short, for a hand gripped his wrist and another closed over his mouth and he was dragged into the cab as the door banged. The cab moved off at a rattling pace, and Rollison, almost suffocated by the pressure on his mouth, could hardly move.

"Going to Scotland Yard, are you," said the man with the cultured voice.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Unexpected Journey

"Keep still!" the man said, and struck Rollison across the face. He had released his grip, and Rollison was trying to get himself more comfortable. The scratch on his leg troubled him and he was half-kneeling, half-lying, across the legs of the two occupants of the taxi. He could just see their faces, pale in the darkness.

Soon, he managed to ease his leg, and stopped moving.

"That's better," the man said. "You've made a mistake this time, Rollison. You aren't going to Scotland Yard."

"Be careful, Gregson!" said the other, who was the self-styled Keller. "He might try to jump out."

"He won't take the risk," said Gregson, confidently. "Sit on one of the tip-up seats, Rollison. Don't forget that we mean business. If you should meet with a nasty accident – well, *you* wouldn't know much about it."

Groping in the darkness, Rollison pulled a seat down and sat on it. He had not recovered enough to strike out at the others; he doubted whether he would be wise to. Their confidence now was as great as it had been at the flat, with better reason.

Gregson said: "I've got a shot of morphia here, Rollison; if you get funny you'll have it, and you won't wake up again. This is your last chance, if you behave yourself."

Rollison forced himself to reply: "Accommodating of you. You're well-equipped, aren't you? Am I going to hear more about my own backyard?"

"That's enough of that!" snapped 'Keller'.

He was keeping in the background, the role of spokesman had been switched; Rollison wondered who was really the leader.

He should have been prepared for such an attack. Had the taxi been waiting, he would have wondered whether it had been there fortuitously, but as it had been moving away, after dropping a fare, he had not thought twice about it. The incident had been very well-planned.

The only consolation lay in the fact that they still seemed disposed to reason.

The taxi was driving through the back streets of the East End. It had turned round outside the station and was heading further east; he thought they were near the docks. He saw an occasional passer-by from the glow of a cigarette in the darkness. His breathing was easier, and he was beginning to feel more capable of tackling the situation.

"You aren't feeling so clever, are you?" sneered Gregson. "You think you're a lot smarter than you are, Rollison. If there was anything in your reputation, you wouldn't have fallen for this trick."

Rollison said heartily: "I couldn't agree more!"

The man exclaimed “What?” and fell silent. The taxi was going over cobbled surface, which was a further proof that they were in the dockside area.

“You’d better agree with me again,” Gregson said. “You’ve gone far enough. Who told you about the whisky?”

“Whisky?” ejaculated Rollison.

“Come on, you know all about that,” said Gregson.

“Don’t you know about it?”

“Gregson, he—” began ‘Keller’.

“I didn’t know it was a whisky racket,” declared Rollison, and then went on in a wondering voice: “I thought it was something big!” He gave a hollow laugh, and wondered if he was overdoing it. There was a startled silence, followed by an oath from Keller.

“Then what the hell *are* you after?”

“I’m simply helping Kemp,” said Rollison, truthfully.

“You’re helping that—” Keller broke off, with an exasperated note in his voice. “He’s been fooling us,” he growled. “We needn’t have worried about him.”

“Who’s worried?” asked Gregson, but he sounded uneasy. “All right, so you didn’t know. We hijacked a few bottles of booze,” he went on, too quickly. “We thought you knew about it.”

Rollison said ruefully: “I could do with a small crate myself.”

The taxi came to a standstill as he spoke.

Any hopes of breaking away were dashed at once, for the door was opened by a man outside. As he climbed out, Rollison’s wrist was gripped and he saw other shadowy figures crowding round. The man already holding him took a grip on the back of his neck and pushed him forward. He stumbled over a doorstep and along an unlighted passage: there was a faint glow of light at the far end.

“Stop, cully,” ordered his captor.

He stopped. The front door closed and a light was switched on. Three men were in the passage, besides ‘Keller’ and Gregson. They were characteristic East Enders, of the tougher breed.

The passage had green distempered walls, the floor was of unstained boards, and it looked like part of a warehouse. Soon, Rollison was in an office, which might have been that of any business firm; his eye was caught by a fine Mirzapore carpet, with a round hole in the middle, with its edges bound.

Gregson pushed past him and sat at a roll-top desk. Keller also sat down and one of the men stood by the door; the others went out. Gregson, his handsome face clear-cut beneath the light from an unshaded lamp, stared at him, tight lipped. ‘Keller’s’ brown eyes were narrowed, and he seemed much more on edge than the other.

“Well, Rollison?” Gregson spoke at last. “Are you going to be sensible about this?”

“That depends what you call sensible,” said Rollison.

"It's none of your business. Kemp's all right now; we couldn't run him out of the district if we tried, so we won't waste our time trying." Apparently he took it for granted that Rollison had assumed the crane incident to be an accident. "You've done what you started out to do, and we're doing no one any harm. If you'll undertake to go back to your flat and forget about us, we'll let you go. And we'll give you a dozen *Black and White,* into the bargain!"

As he finished, Gregson smiled, invitingly.

"Well, it's an attractive proposition," admitted Rollison. "But you aren't fools, are you?"

"You'll find out," growled 'Keller'.

"Be quiet," ordered Gregson. "No, we're not fools, Rollison."

"So I imagined. What's to prevent me from giving you a promise, and then breaking it?"

"I told you—" 'Keller' began.

"Oh, be quiet!" repeated Gregson harshly. "We know you might do that, Rollison, but if you do – well, you know what happened to O'Hara."

"Yes. Intimidating," murmured Rollison. "The thing is, I'm not convinced that you're resigned to Kemp staying on. I mean, what happened to O'Hara could easily happen to him."

"Now look here," said Gregson, still reasoning, "if we were to kill Kemp, or even you, the police wouldn't rest until they'd turned Whitechapel upside down. We don't want them to do that. This is the reasonable way. You're a man of the world. It doesn't matter to you if a few cases of whisky get stolen and sold at a good profit. That's what we're doing – but it's a dangerous game, these days. We'd be charged with black marketing, and we might get seven years. That's enough to make us careful – and to shut the mouth of talkers like O'Hara."

"So O'Hara talked too much," said Rollison.

"He couldn't keep his mouth shut when he'd had a couple," said Gregson. "It was a coincidence that Craik was there when he was killed."

"And an accident that Craik's knife was used?"

"It didn't matter whose knife, so long as it didn't belong to the man who actually used it," said Gregson. "O'Hara was nothing to you, Rollison. He was an Irishman who's only been here six months, and he's a loss to no one. He wasn't even married! Listen to me. We've heard a lot about you. Perhaps you're good, and you've just been unlucky this time. It doesn't matter either way. *You* aren't a fool, either. This job isn't one you need worry about, so forget all about it and go home and enjoy yourself with free *Black and White.* "

"Genuine stuff?" inquired Rollison.

He wanted Gregson to continue to reason with him, for it gave him more time to size up the situation. There was a snag; they surely wouldn't let him go.

What *would* they do?

"Of *course* it's genuine," said Gregson. "I wouldn't cheat—"

Heavy footsteps in the passage outside cut across his words. Rollison thought he heard a shout. ‘Keller’ glanced towards the door as it burst open, and a man rushed in.

“Get away!” he gasped, and paused for breath. “The cops are outside!”

‘Keller’ swung round towards Rollison, and pulled a gun from his pocket.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

The Interest Of The Police

Rollison, expecting to be shot, dropped to the floor, keeping his eyes on 'Keller'. There was no time even to grab at one of the ledgers on the desk, as a missile. It seemed like his last moment.

Then Gregson struck 'Keller's' arm aside.

Gregson said nothing, but simply grabbed 'Keller's' arm and hustled him forward. The man by the door and the messenger were already in the passage.

Gregson slammed the door and turned the key on the outside.

Rollison picked himself up slowly, choked by relief. Gradually, he became aware of the footsteps. As soon as one lot faded, another drew nearer: the police were already in the building. He looked about the office, and opened one of the ledgers. There were entries for various items of groceries, all neatly written up in a youthful hand. He resisted the temptation to look through the other papers on the desk, not wanting to be caught red-handed. He heard someone banging on a door not far away.

"I wonder how—" he began, then snapped his fingers. "Jolly, of course! He traced Gregson!"

He pulled the ledger towards him. The firm's name was Mellish and Crow, Limited, and certainly their business appeared to be genuine. He had a feeling that he had heard of them before, but could not keep his mind on the book, just glanced through it, thinking: "If Gregson hadn't stopped him, Keller would have shot me. So I owe Gregson my life. Sensible thing to do – with a corpse on the premises he would have been for the high jump. But he was very quick – and Keller didn't think. Strange metamorphosis, Keller seemed to be the big shot yesterday."

He stopped, as an entry in the ledger caught his eye.

"Straker. . . £107. 11.6d."

Rollison remembered that was the name of the haulage firm which worked for East Wharf.

The police were making a long and careful job of the building. He wondered if they had found some of the men and whether a fight was in progress.

At last they arrived – and Jolly was with Chumley. Jolly's eyes brightened at the sight of the Toff. He stepped forward swiftly.

"Are you hurt, sir?"

"Only a scratch, and it wasn't done here," Rollison said.

"I'm very glad, sir." Jolly glanced at Chumley, whose red face was set, showing nothing of the affability which was his favourite pose. Jolly went on carefully: "I knew you were being brought here, sir, and in the circumstances I thought it best to send for assistance."

“In spite of arousing the interest of the police,” smiled Rollison. “You couldn’t have been more right.”

“I’m glad you realise that, Rollison,” Chumley said sarcastically. “Now perhaps you will stop lying to us. You’ve lied far too much.”

“Not really,” protested Rollison. “Afraid of guessing too much and misinforming you, knowing your dislike of doing the wrong thing! However, it’s a clear-cut issue for the police now. Two men tricked me into a taxi and threatened to kill me unless I withdrew from the district and went back home. They also said that they were indignant that I should try to interfere in a little matter of stolen whisky and its redistribution.”

“Whisky?” echoed Chumley. His interest, already keen, grew sharper.

“Yes. They tried to bribe me with a case of *Black and White,”* went on Rollison.

“Have you searched this place?” demanded Chumley.

“No. I haven’t been here for more than five minutes on my own.”

“You can do plenty in five minutes,” declared Chumley, darkly. “Sure you haven’t touched anything?”

“Frisk me,” invited Rollison, throwing out his arms in an exaggerated gesture. “I won’t make any complaint about illegal searching. Even if I’d had the time to touch anything,” he added, still standing with his arms stretched out, “I wouldn’t have had the inclination.”

“Why not?” demanded Chumley.

“I can’t imagine that they would have brought me to a place which, if afterwards located, might yield up its deadly secrets,” Rollison said lightly. “It wouldn’t surprise me to find that the premises belong to some estimable firm, the management of which will be horrified to discover what’s going on at night.”

“We’ll find out,” said Chumley, and ordered his men to begin searching.

Jolly found a first aid box in a cloakroom, and dabbed iodine freely on Rollison’s scratch, fixing lint and adhesive plaster over it, and rebuking him for not having attended to it before.

Chumley pressed questions and he told the simple truth, giving the names by which he knew the two men, and omitting only that he had known before of the whisky motive. Had Chumley been his usual genial self, Rollison would have been tempted to be more frank. As it was, the policeman became more terse and nearly abusive.

Rollison, smoking and sitting on an upright chair, stared at him coldly.

“I’m beginning to understand why Kemp got such a low opinion of the police,” he said.

Chumley bit his lips, and turned away.

Inside an hour, a representative of the management arrived. He was an old, grey-haired, mild-mannered man, at first indignant at the police invasion, then apologetic and obviously puzzled. Thus he laid himself open to some of Chumley’s ‘pressure’. Rollison stood by and did nothing, and Chumley began to raise his voice.

The grey-haired man stood it for some minutes, seeming to grow

flustered, but when Chumley called him a liar, he spoke with unexpected sharpness.

"Are you a police officer, sir, or merely an ill-mannered ruffian?"

Rollison caught Jolly's eye. Chumley calmed down, but asked more questions. Nothing the man said and nothing that was discovered suggested that the warehouse was being used as a storage place for whisky, and the indications were that it had been used, as Rollison had suggested, as a meeting place. The night-watchman stoutly maintained that he knew nothing about it, but he cracked unexpectedly. 'They' had made him do it, he declared; 'they' had threatened him with violence unless he let them in. "They' had been using the office from time to time over a period of six months. He did not know why, and he did not know their names, but he knew that a number of people called there to see them.

It was three in the morning before Chumley conceded that there was no need to stay longer.

Walking up the stairs to the flat, Rollison limped noticeably, and when they were inside, Jolly said: "I think you'd better spend a day in your room tomorrow, sir. Your leg might get much worse."

"Day in bed be—" began Rollison, then saw Jolly's expression and grinned. "A day not in the office! Yes, that's more like it! Are you forgetting that I'm a Whitehall Warrior deeply involved in the conduct of the war?"

"I would rate this affair somewhat higher than investigating the pilfering of Army depots," murmured Jolly.

"Well, well!" exclaimed Rollison. "How did you manage to find that out? You'd located Gregson, I suppose, and managed to keep behind the taxi?"

"I was nearby, sir, and I heard someone mention the warehouse address, so I telephoned Chumley immediately and hurried there myself. I thought it unwise to try to prevent you from entering the taxi. Had I done so, we might not have learned so much."

"No," admitted Rollison. "This is certainly your day. By George, I'm tired!" He stubbed out a cigarette. "It's a pity but I must go to the office in the morning. There's a Conference of Great Men."

"At what time, sir?" asked Jolly.

"Eleven o'clock," said Rollison.

It was ten o'clock next morning when Jolly called him. Rollison looked at his watch, stared at Jolly, and was told mildly: "I think you have good time for the Conference, sir."

Although his leg was stiff, he felt rested and much more able to cope with the pretentious big brass who were to sit with him round a horseshoe-shaped table and discuss the matter of pilfering from Army depots. Although the pilfering reached alarming proportions and needed close investigation, Rollison disagreed with the attempt to solve it under central direction. As soon as the problem was solved in one place, it broke out in another. He did not agree that it was organized, but that, being so spasmodic, it was purely local. Since his particular task was less concerned with stopping the trouble than with arriving at the totals of material and value lost, his heart was not

in it and he made frequent attempts to get transferred to another Department; he had almost given up the hope of getting back to active service.

The Conference lingered on until late afternoon. By then, correspondence had accumulated and it was nearly half-past six before Rollison saw his A.T.S. clerk seal the last letter.

"Is there anything else, sir?" she asked.

"Yes," said Rollison. "Do you ever go to West End nightclubs?"

"Why, yes – occasionally, sir!"

"What's the whisky like?"

"You shouldn't touch it," she said, confidentially. "It's enough to put you out on your feet!"

"How do they sell it?" asked Rollison. "I mean, could you go and buy me a bottle tonight, say?"

"I suppose I *could,"* she said, looking at him suspiciously, for he spoke as if obtaining a bottle of whisky would be a great adventure. And then a false light dawned upon her. "If you really *want* some whisky, sir, a friend of mine is in the trade, and I could get you some."

"That's sweet of you," said Rollison, smiling. "But I haven't gone mad. I want a bottle of the stuff I would buy at a nightclub, but I don't want to buy it myself."

Then the true light dawned, and she hugged herself as she went off, having sworn that she would not confide in a soul.

Rollison telephoned Jolly, to learn that he had not been able to find Gregson again, but that the police were having one of their periodic comb-outs of the East End, that many people were already in hiding, and the Fighting Parson was no longer the ruling topic.

"That's better," said Rollison. "He doesn't want the limelight. I'll go to see Cobbett the crane driver, I think."

"Very good, sir," said Jolly.

Rollison had purposely kept from the crane driver, and not asked anyone else to watch him, believing it would be better if Cobbett lived in a fool's paradise for a few hours. The time had come for the direct approach. But he was not able to go immediately, for as he left Whitehall, a stolid detective sergeant in plainclothes approached and asked politely if he would mind stepping along to Scotland Yard.

About the time that Rollison was walking towards Scotland Yard with the amiable sergeant, Joe Craik was putting up the blackout shutters at his shop. After every one, he stopped and rubbed his hands, sniffed and smiled his quivering, rabbit smile. He was not furtive, yet gave the impression that he was afraid that people were pointing him out and talking about him.

When he had nearly finished, a youthful figure appeared in front of the shop. Craik turned and looked into the narrowed eyes of Cobbett the crane driver.

"Now, what do *you* want?" demanded Craik, sharply.

Cobbett sniffed. Two or three people including a monstrously fat woman were walking by the shop and heard the opening remarks. The woman stayed within earshot.

"Have you heard about the accident?" demanded Cobbett.

"Yes, you fool! You might have—"

"Doan rub it in," pleaded Cobbett, and if he was acting he was doing so very well. "Wot ought I to do, Mr. Craik? I never meant it."

Craik rubbed his hands, and then said: "Well, my boy, if you're really sorry, then I won't make it any the worse for you. I know what you can do – go along to Mr. Kemp, the curate, and tell him how sorry you are."

"Do you think—" Cobbett began.

"He won't refuse to forgive you, my boy," said Craik. "You run along."

Cobbett still looked miserable, but nodded and obeyed.

The fat woman wearing a coloured shawl and a tattered skirt, the hem of which dragged along the pavement, had heard every word. She moved on with a great effort when Craik finished his task, sniffing, and saying in an audible voice: "If I'd have moved off soon's the boy 'ad stopped, he would'a said I was listening to 'im, that 'e would!"

Her fleshy face was set in lines of disgust.

She waddled as far as Little Lane, turned into it, and eventually reached Number 49. Outside, two of Bill Ebbutt's men called out good-humouredly: "What's the latest, Ma?"

She tossed her head at them, and was admitted to the Whitings' home by one of the children, who called her Mrs. Parsons. Then, she regaled the old woman at the house with everything she had heard.

Mrs. Parsons was, beyond all doubt, the district's most notorious gossip. Some said there was no malice in her, and that she could no more keep information to herself than a colander could hold water. The fact that she talked and that no confidence was safe with her, was extremely well known – as was the fact that she had one particular crony, Mrs. Whiting's mother.

She was not a stranger to Rollison, of whom she always spoke in hushed tones as 'The Torf' and before whom she always curtseyed, but he had not been to see her often recently, for he had come to the conclusion that she developed trivial incidents so colourfully and plausibly that they became entirely different from the original.

Soon, she was on her way again, and immediately afterwards Mrs. Whiting's mother came hurrying out. So two tongues started wagging. Before long, the whole district knew that Cobbett was going to see the curate, and wondered why. The story of the accident was already well-known, and one of the characteristics of the East End was that when anything happened to the Toff, it had no chance of being passed over; it became an item of general interest.

Rollison, unaware of the significance in the talk, walked along with the sergeant towards Scotland Yard.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

The Return Of The Holiday Maker

Rollison was not greatly perturbed as he walked into the familiar hall of Scotland Yard, although a telephoned request would have been more normal. The fact that a sergeant had been waiting outside one entrance of the building suggested that the others had been watched, and that the Yard had been determined to see him quickly.

On the way, he had talked about the weather.

At the Yard, he asked who wanted to see him.

"Superintendent Grice, sir," said the sergeant.

Rollison was pleasantly surprised, for not only did he know Grice well, but he was sure that Grice would be helpful whenever he could be. So he entered the spacious office with a smile, as Grice rose from his chair. The Superintendent was a tall, spare man whose complexion was normally very like a woman's, and whose skin was stretched tight across his face, particularly at his nose, thus emphasising its high bridge. Grice's complexion and his large brown eyes – not unlike 'Keller's' – were his most noticeable features, but Rollison was amazed when he saw him.

"Well, well!" he exclaimed. "The holiday maker returned – slightly sunburned!"

Grice, his face bright red with sunburn, managed a painful grin.

"Don't rub it in," he said. "It's as stiff as blazes."

"The policeman who never grew up!" Rollison sat down and stretched out his long legs. "What's brought you back early?"

"You," said Grice.

"Not I – distrustful policemen elsewhere, I'm afraid."

"Judging from a 'phone call I've had from Chumley, he's more than distrustful – he's highly suspicious! You needn't tell me that he should know better. You should have treated Chumley more leniently, Rolly."

"He is rather fond of throwing his weight about and—"

"You could have satisfied him without getting his back up," remonstrated Grice.

"I rather wanted his back up," murmured Rollison.

"I expected as much," commented Grice. "Well, where will you start?"

"I don't start," said Rollison, "I was badgered into coming here by a police sergeant whose expression proved that he knew he was doing the wrong thing. Whose idea was that?"

"Mine. One of Chumley's men was here and I made him see I really meant business."

"Good!" said Rollison. "What business? Whisky?"

"Now you're getting interesting," said Grice. "What do you know about the whisky-running?"

“Very little,” answered Rollison, cautiously. “I didn’t believe Gregson when he told me that he was stealing a few cases and passing them on at a profit. I think it goes deeper. Does it?”

“Now you’re asking,” Grice said.

Rollison took out his cigarette case and lit a cigarette – Grice rarely smoked – and carefully replaced the case. After that, he contemplated Grice in silence for some minutes, before saying quietly: “You and I needn’t beat about the bush, need we?”

“What really took you to Whitechapel in the first place?” asked Grice.

“Kemp! Just Kemp! Nothing but Kemp! He was getting a raw deal, and he’s still in danger, perhaps deadlier than before. So I’m still interested.” Rollison spoke quietly but emphatically. “I think he’s stumbled across a whisky-racket, but I know nothing beyond that and I’m not going to theorise, for Chumley, you, or the A.C. himself. The truth is,” went on Rollison, warming up, “that as soon as the word ‘whisky’ was mentioned, Chumley pricked up his ears, and before I could turn round, you’d cut short your holiday. Presumably, you were working on it before, decided you could take a holiday but came haring back as soon as you knew that trouble had broken out about it.”

Grice’s manner relaxed.

“You’re pretty well on the mark, Rolly. But the thing I find it hard to believe and which Chumley refuses to accept, is that you went down to Whitechapel on Kemp’s behalf alone. Was it partly because you’d been working on the case elsewhere and found a lead?”

“It was not. Where do you imagine I would have started?”

“I wouldn’t try to guess,” said Grice.

“This last day or two I’ve guessed that there is a lot of hooch being distributed throughout the West End,” said Rollison. “Is there?”

Grice leaned forward and spoke with unexpected warmth.

“There is, and it’s not ordinary hooch. Much of it is poison. We’ve had complaints from our own service authorities, from the Americans, and from several of the Allied Governments – officers and men in London on leave have drunk the stuff and made themselves ill. There have been two fatalities, due to acute alcoholic poisoning. The deaths were directly attributable to the whisky. Do you mean to tell me that you didn’t know?”

“Of course. I wouldn’t have been working overtime if I had. Do you mind if I use your telephone?” Grice looked puzzled, but shook his head, and Rollison put a call through to his office. In a few seconds, a weary Bimbleton answered him.

“Bimble, old chap,” said Rollison, “have you heard about complaints in high places of some of our chaps suffering severely from drinking bad whisky in the West End?”

“Yeh,” said Bimbleton, and then articulated more clearly: “Why, yes, Rollison. I’m sorry. I was just eating a sandwich.”

“Who is handling it?” asked Rollison. “The drink, not the sandwich.”

“Cracknell,” Bimbleton said.

“Is he on duty, do you know?”

“No, he’s left I think – no, wait a minute! I saw him coming in half-an-hour ago.”

“Put me through to him, will you?” asked Rollison, and sat back, beaming at Grice, who looked a little less mystified. Soon, a crisp voice sounded in Rollison’s ear and Rollison introduced himself with some circumspection.

“Yes, Rollison,” said Cracknell, who carried much weight at Whitehall. “What’s that? . . . Yes, it is quite true. . . Are you su”I’m quite sure, sir,” Rollison assured him. “I think, with a little luck, we could see the end of it inside a week. The difficulty is that I’m so tied to the office.”

“This isn’t some pet scheme of your own for which you want leave, is it?” demanded Cracknell, suspiciously.

“I’m in the office of Superintendent Grice, of Scotland Yard,” Rollison told him. “He asked me to see him about this very business.”

“I’ll do what I can to arrange for you to be assigned to it,” Cracknell promised.

“Thanks very much,” said the Toff, warmly. “I take it that it is regarded seriously?”

“*Extremely* so,” said Cracknell, but there was an echo of laughter in his voice. “Why do you ask?”

“If it’s a matter of urgency, I shouldn’t waste any time,” said Rollison.

“You can consider yourself assigned to it,” said Cracknell, and rang off; the last Rollison heard from him was the beginning of an explosive laugh.

As Rollison replaced the receiver, Grice said: ‘”One day, you’ll wheedle yourself into active service again, I can see it coming. Then what will we poor flatfoots do at Scotland Yard?”

“Wheedle me back!” replied Rollison. “Grice you couldn’t have done me a better service, and Jolly will probably send you a congratulatory telegram! I am now working on this job in an official capacity, and while I am fully prepared to cooperate with the police, I must reserve the right to act as I think best in the interests of men and women of the services who, in their all-too-brief spells of leave, are being raddled with a firewater sold under the name of whisky, and”

“That’s enough!” cried Grice. “Well, exactly how much *do* you know?”

Rollison passed on the whole story. Grice made notes on a pad, and when Rollison had finished, they eyed each other thoughtfully. It was Grice who broke the silence.

“Do you think it would be wrong to try to force the case in Whitechapel just yet?”

“Yes. Don’t you?”

“Probably,” admitted Grice, “although it can’t be left too long. We’ll have to get Gregson and the man who calls himself ‘Keller’ as soon as we can. Chumley has descriptions of them, and is already hard at work.”

“I doubt whether he’ll get them,” said Rollison. “My worry is – where is it distributed from in the West End? Have you found any store places at all?”

“One or two small ones,” said Grice. “It doesn’t appear to be delivered in

large quantities, only a few dozen at a time. We've found seven or eight retail suppliers. All of them swear that they buy it legally, and believe that it is ordinary stuff – the story is so circumstantial in every case that it seems as if the organizers use a formula."

"They're not associated clubs, are they?"

"No, they're all quite independent."

"Then if they use a formula, it's one which they're told to use by the suppliers," said Rollison. "What's the story? The bottles of bad stuff were found among deliveries from the reputable companies."

"Yes?"

"And the reputable companies know nothing about it, of course," went on Rollison. "How long has it been worrying you?"

"For the better part of six months."

"It all seems to have started about six months ago," admitted Rollison, looking very thoughtful. "You remember that I told you that Irish dock workers were concerned?"

"Yes. I'll look into that angle."

"Not a bad idea," said Rollison. "Well, we're making progress of a kind. The main trouble is that I've started working from the wrong angle. They may distribute it in small quantities, but there appears to be a lot of it about. Given much thought to distribution?"

"Yes," said Grice.

He did not enlarge, and so gave Rollison the impression that he was holding something back. Rollison did not attempt to force any information, but went on thoughtfully: "East Wharf might possibly be the distributing point, as there's a lot of quite legitimate stuff brought in – does any of it come from Eire, do you know?"

"Some, yes," said Grice cautiously. "But most Irish goods come in at the West coast ports. Some shipments come direct to London, but if you're thinking that the stuff is Irish whisky, you're—"

Rollison laughed.

"Don't insult the Irish distillers. But where are there as many illicit stills as in Ireland? If a manager or foreman of a wharf cooperated, it might be brought off the ships."

"There's no evidence that it is, and I think it's made in England," Grice said.

"You're probably right," admitted Rollison. "However, supposing it is brought in at East Wharf, what happens to it then? It could be loaded straight on to the lorries and—"

He paused.

"Now what's in your mind?" demanded Grice.

"I was picturing a charming little scene at the wharf," said Rollison. "A big Irishman ribbed an English docker, who promptly called him a neutral, and started a free fight. All without malice as far as I could see. But as soon as it had stopped – the foreman handled it well – the combatants were put on to loading the same lorry. They must have been in a big hurry to get the

lorry loaded and off."

"Why?" asked Grice.

"You know, you're not really as dull as this! The obvious reason would be to get whatever they were loading *en route* before the police arrived. Police would be bound to arrive on the scene as soon as word of the accident reached them, wouldn't they?"

"Do you think East Wharf should be raided?"

"Certainly not just now!" exclaimed Rollison. "If there's anything in the idea, the stuff has been sent away and we'd only put them on their guard. You might care to find out if that was an Irish ship though, and keep some eyes open when the next one comes in from Eire. A suggestion only!" he added, mildly.

"I know all about your suggestions," said Grice. "It's a good one, anyhow."

"Thanks. Do you know your Sergeant Bray very well?"

"Fairly well," said Grice, cautiously.

"Is he as hot headed as he seems? I gathered that he made the arrest a little precipitately."

"He was right to act as he did, and also right to take Craik to Divisional headquarters. Bray's a good chap. He might have made a mistake, but if you're asking me whether I propose to reprimand him for this, I'm not."

"I should hope not!" exclaimed Rollison. "Er – Chumley was spry, too, wasn't he?"

"Chumley *is* spry," said Grice, quietly.

Rollison raised an eyebrow.

"Like that, is it? I was mistaken, I always thought he was one of the better men in the Division, but he's showing unsuspected qualities of slyness, too. I suppose he wants to keep the glory in the Division?"

Grice made no comment.

"It's a thousand pities that you can't be frank, by reason of the rules and regulations," Rollison remarked.

Grice smiled and said gently: "There are no rules and regulations binding you!"

"True," admitted Rollison. "But then, I'm nearly always frank with you! It's certainly a pity that we can't make a completely fresh start in this business. Seeing that I am in on the ground floor, why not let me have my head, without base suspicions of personal motives and dark whisperings about being unorthodox?"

"In other words, will the police authorise you to continue to work your own way!"

"Wrong," murmured Rollison. "Will the police authorise the Military Authorities?"

Grice was still smiling, in spite of his sunburn and his reticence, when Rollison left his office.

Rollison felt very much more cheerful as he hurried to Gresham Terrace and regaled Jolly with the news.

"And what will you do now, sir?" asked Jolly, obviously pleased.

"I'll see Cobbett," said Rollison. "You'd better have a look round the clubs in the Mayfair area. Don't be too obvious, but try to find out whether Gregson has been an intermediary, or our man with the big brown eyes. Failing either, try to find out who has been peddling it in this part of the world."

"Very good, sir," said Jolly, who was used to attempting the impossible, but never complained, for Rollison never asked him to attempt what he would not try himself.

Still in a good humour, Rollison left the flat before his man, remembering that he had not yet had dinner. He had missed it two nights running, and decided that he could safely afford an hour at his club. He managed to get a single table and thus avoided conversation. Soon after nine o'clock, he was on his way to the home of Cobbett the crane driver. There, he was told by a sharp-voiced, middle-aged woman – his mother – that Cobbett had not been in all day, and she had no idea where he might be found if not at the Docker. When Rollison tried to get more particulars about her son, she closed up completely. Did that mean she knew that Cobbett would be in trouble if she talked?

He went to the Docker, but Cobbett was not there.

With veiled insolence, the barman told him that Cobbett had not been in all day, and the blousy barmaid, who had once inspired Keller's mob to attack a man who had waited for her after opening hours, did not even spare Rollison a glance. None of the customers appeared to recognise him.

On the other side of the road, when he left, were three familiar looking men, and further along, another three. They were plainclothes policemen, trying to look the part of dock labourers. That was a mistake. Thoughtfully, he strolled towards Jupe Street and was near it when a police car turned the corner. In it, he saw Chumley.

"So the Docker's is going to be raided," mused Rollison, and was smiling when he reached the hall.

Kemp was reading in his little room. He put his book down and jumped up.

"Billy the Bull's been asking for you, Rolly."

"When?" asked Rollison.

"He's sent that bald-headed second round several times, since five o'clock," said Kemp. "I wouldn't be surprised if—"

Before he could finish, the door opened and Billy the Bull's second danced in, squeaked complainingly that he could not waste all day, and demanded that Rollison should go with him. He talked shrilly and at length, but by winks, nods and asides, gave the impression that he was aware that he was taking part in a conspiracy of great importance. Rollison humoured him, and not until they were out of Kemp's hearing did the little man say: "Billy said I wasn't to tell anyone *where* we was goin', Mr. Ar, 'sept you."

"Where are we going?" asked Rollison, patiently.

"St. Guy's hall, near East Wharf," answered the bald-headed man. "Billy

and me have bin watchin' it, like you said. Took over at three o'clock, we did. A coupla ruffians" – he brought the word out contemptuously – "tried to start a fight. A fight, wiv Billy!"

"They couldn't have known Billy," said Rollison, quickening his pace. The little man danced by his side and soon they were within sight of the wharf. There was no sign of activity, for the ship had been cleared of its cargo. The W.V.S. canteen was not there, and the wooden hall, with its flimsy wire fence wrecked by the previous night's incident, looked small and lonely against the high walls of warehouses some distance behind it.

Billy the Bull was pacing up and down.

"I'm glad you've come, Mr. Ar," he said, worriedly, "I dunno that I like it. Bill Ebbutt told me that I wasn't ter come too close, an' wasn't ter look inside, but if you arst me, it's time someone did."

"Why?" asked Rollison, hurrying towards the hall.

"Two fellers tried to start a fight," said Billy, "but I wouldn't 'ave nothing to do wiv' them, Mr. Ar." He was very serious. "Soon's I looked rahnd, there was another couple on the other side've the 'all, but I never seed them go in. Do yer fink we've found sunnink?"

"It wouldn't surprise me," said Rollison.

It took him five minutes to pick the lock of the hall, under the admiring gaze of Billy and his companion. He pushed open the door and stepped cautiously inside, but there was no need for caution. The only occupant was Cobbett. He had been strangled, and his crumpled body lay in the middle of the floor.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

The Endeavours Of Chumley

Fresh from what had proved a fruitless raid on the Docker, where all the liquor had been legally obtained, and where the occupants had openly derided the police, Chumley went to the scene of Cobbett's murder. He was not in a good mood; and was still sore with the Toff. He asked questions, browbeat Billy the Bull, seemed to regret that there was evidence that Rollison had not been there alone, and said that he proposed to pull the hall down, if necessary, to find what was hidden there.

"Nothing's hidden here," said Rollison. "If there were, they wouldn't have murdered Cobbett on the premises."

'"Even *you* might be wrong," said Chumley, sarcastically.

But there was nothing hidden in the hall, nor beneath it; there was nothing to indicate that it had been used as a storage place for whisky, or other contraband. The back door had not been forced; Cobbett's murderers had used a key. There were no fingerprints, nothing that might serve as a clue, and Billy the Bull could give no reliable description of the men he had seen.

Chumley will try the other places now, thought Rollison, and one was bound to yield results. He stayed close to Chumley all the evening as they went from hall to hall. Kemp joined them, giving permission for the search freely. No one had the chance to tell Rollison of Craik's advice to Cobbett.

Nor did Kemp talk of his visitor.

There was nothing at the first hall.

By the time they reached the second, Craik, Whiting, and several other members of St. Guy's had arrived, with a crowd of sightseers, some of whom jeered, and some looked pale and worried. The comb-out of the East End was proceeding fast; suspects were being detained and questioned.

Rollison was prepared to find the store of whisky at the hall, and was wondering what his best course would be afterwards, but *nothing was found.*

Kemp was relieved. Chumley was obviously disappointed. Craik was smiling, his lips quivering like a rabbit's; that might also have been with relief.

Chumley turned away from a sergeant, and said audibly: "Someone's tipped them off, that's what's happened."

He looked meaningly towards Rollison, who ignored him and walked off with Kemp. As they neared Jupe Street, Kemp asked: "Do you think they were warned, Rollison?"

"Possibly," conceded Rollison, "but if there were stores of the whisky in any of the halls earlier today, or even yesterday, I don't think they could have been moved without a trace. There's something I've missed," he went on. "It's something fairly obvious, and it concerns you. Be more careful than

ever."

"I suppose you couldn't be wrong in thinking—"

"Cobbett was killed because he might have talked too freely – he was badly scared last night," said Rollison. "O'Hara was killed for the same reason. You might be next on the list."

"But what could *I* talk about?"

"Presumably, nothing, yet. It's something you might come across," said Rollison. He arranged for Grice to send two Scotland Yard men to watch Kemp as unobtrusively as possible, then returned to Gresham Terrace, where Jolly found him, an hour later, in a mood not far removed from dejection. As the valet entered, Rollison looked up.

"Any luck?" he demanded.

"Not yet, sir," began Jolly, "I—"

"I've been making you waste your time and I've wasted my own," Rollison said, and he went into some detail. "I thought I had one thing sewn up, and when the bag was opened there wasn't even a rabbit inside. We're being played for suckers, Jolly!"

"I can't believe that, sir."

"I can, and do," said Rollison. "I've reached the point where I think Kemp might be being persecuted simply to distract attention from the real purpose. Note how carefully everything has been covered up. Keller – and a shadowy individual who might be Keller. Gregson taking orders one night, giving them the next. The Docker deliberately thrust into our faces – and nothing gained from the pub."

"As you expected," murmured Jolly.

"Yes, but I did expect something from the halls."

Jolly said, quietly: "O'Hara and Cobbett *were* murdered, sir. I hardly think anyone would go to the lengths of murder in order to throw out a smokescreen, if I may use the allegory. Both of those men could have betrayed the leaders. That is certain."

"Ye – es. Find their murderers, find the – Jolly!"

"Yes, sir?"

"Did I make a mistake in confiding in that foreman, Owen? Who else knew that I suspected Cobbett?"

Jolly eyed him steadily, seemed about to speak, and then changed his mind, and suggested that he should make some coffee.

"You stay where you are," said Rollison. "What were you going to say?"

"I don't really think—" began Jolly.

"Out with it," insisted Rollison. "I don't want concern for my feelings. If I've missed an obvious possibility, tell me. I'm beginning to think I have."

"I don't think so, sir," said Jolly, looking troubled. "In fact, I feel hardly justified in mentioning what sprang to my mind, but since you insist, I will tell you. You might have been wrong in confiding in Owen, but he was not the only man whom you told of your suspicions of Cobbett."

"Now, come! Chumley may be feeling sour and might have tumbled to it, but—"

"I'm not thinking of the police, sir," said Jolly, still ill-at-ease, "and I'm not thinking seriously of Mr. Kemp, but you *did* let him know that you considered last night's accident might have been an attempt to murder him, didn't you? And, if the mission halls were being used but were emptied in a hurry, it means that there was a leakage of information."

"Oh, no," said Rollison, blankly. "Our fighting parson? Now, be serious, Jolly!"

He neither expected nor hoped to silence his man; in fact his words constituted a challenge, and probably nothing else would have encouraged Jolly to explain his reasoning. Nettled, Jolly said: "The truth is, sir, that we are in danger of surrendering to sentiment, which prevents us from considering Mr. Kemp as a suspect. After all, the trouble started six months ago."

Rollison whistled. "By George!"

"That was when Mr. Kemp first took up his position at St. Guy's," continued Jolly, firmly.

"Moreover, although any one of a number of people might have given warning that you thought the halls might be used to store the whisky, only Mr. Kemp and Owen could have known that you proposed to visit Cobbett. And there is no reason at all for imagining that Owen knew anything about your suspicions of the halls."

"The only man who always rings the bell is Kemp," said Rollison, impressed in spite of himself.

"It *is* a fact, sir," said Jolly, reluctantly. "I don't know that I would have thought of it myself, except for a rather strange discovery I made this evening. I visited several of the less respectable nightclubs, and at one of them an attendant was extremely impertinent."

He paused, but Rollison kept silent.

"He went so far as to say, sir," said Jolly, feelingly, "that I looked a sanctimonious hypocrite. Those were his actual words. He added that he did not want any more visitors who wore their collars the wrong way round during the day. In the end he apologised, and told me that some seven or eight months ago a youthful clergyman was a frequent visitor. I described Mr. Kemp."

Jolly stopped.

"And the description fitted?" asked Rollison.

"I'm afraid it did, sir," said Jolly. "Naturally it set up a train of thought, so I made other inquiries. I learned that Mr. Kemp held a curacy at one of the Mayfair churches, before he went to St. Guy's." When Rollison still did not speak, he went on almost appealingly: "I did say that our sentiments had blinded us to the possibility, didn't I, sir? In spite of what I learned, I was – I am! – reluctant to think that the circumstances are anything more than coincidental. Aren't you, sir?"

Rollison did not answer.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Help From A Lady

After some minutes of silence, Jolly, looking deeply concerned, as if moved by the expression on Rollison's face, moved restlessly and asked: "Are you feeling all right, sir?"

Rollison bestirred himself, lit a cigarette, and said: "Yes. Make that coffee, will you?"

He sat back in an easy chair, smoking, his eyes narrowed towards the ceiling. He did not stir until Jolly came in, placed the tray on a small table, and turned to go. "Bring a cup for yourself," said Rollison.

"Thank you, sir." Jolly returned with cup and saucer, and Rollison watched while he poured out. On such occasions, it was not Jolly's habit to sit on the edge of the chair – if Rollison suggested a drink together, then Jolly rightly assumed that he did not want to stand on ceremony. When Jolly was sitting back and stirring his coffee, Rollison appeared to relax.

"You're quite right," he said, with a faint smile. "Kemp is the obvious suspect Number One – a shattering realization. I should have remembered that Isobel Crayne told me that she had heard him preach in Mayfair. But unless I am badly mistaken, he is developing a fondness for Miss Crayne. Both of them stood in the way of the crane load last night, and both appeared to be in equal danger. On the other hand, if he were expecting it, he would have known which way to jump. A quick eye and a quick hand – he could have dodged to one side with her at the last moment, and thus lent the utmost credence to the apparent fact that he was nearly a victim. I would probably have been killed, and saved a lot of trouble. Even if I escaped, I would be disinclined to suspect Kemp, whatever the indications. The accident might even have been planned without any thought that I might be present, solely to make the police and me look anywhere but at Kemp."

"It is so, sir," said Jolly. "But—"

"If that's the truth, he had me on a piece of string," Rollison interrupted. "He waited until the last moment, to give me a chance of pushing them aside. An unsung hero! The truth is, he appeared to have no more warning than I. I don't remember vividly, but he gave me the impression of being petrified as he saw the thing coming towards him. Good acting, perhaps."

"We mustn't take it for granted that he is involved—" began Jolly, only to be interrupted again.

"We aren't taking anything for granted." Rollison drank half of his coffee and put the cup down. "I'm worried, Jolly – apart from the shattering possibility that Kemp's involved and the consequent possibility that I have been completely taken in, it's a very ugly situation."

"In what way, sir?"

"If you've discovered that Kemp was once a frequenter of nightclubs, don't you think the police know all about it? They must have. And they've been very clever," he added ruefully, "Grice was even more crafty than Chumley." When Jolly looked mystified, Rollison went on: "Chumley has persistently refused to admit that I was interested primarily in Kemp. Grice emphasised the point, but both of them have lured me into being more than ordinarily emphatic – 'Kemp,' said I, 'only Kemp! Nothing but Kemp!' If Grice thinks as you do, and remembers hearing that from me, isn't he going to assume that I really started from Kemp in the West End, and am trying to pull the wool over his eyes?"

"I suppose he is," admitted Jolly, reluctantly.

"Of course he is! So, if Kemp knows nothing of it, he's being shot at from both sides – by Gregson – Keller as well as by the police. Of the two, the police are more dangerous, because Kemp would have the devil of a job to live down even a temporary detention. Remember how one affected Craik! Whereas, if Kemp does know—" He broke off, standing up abruptly. "I can't believe that he does!"

"I can hardly bring myself to believe it," murmured Jolly. "But the evidence—"

"Yes, I know. And how clever it would be!" Rollison went to the telephone and dialled a number. "Hallo," he said at last, is Miss Isobel Crayne in, please? . . . Yes, I'll hold on." In a few moments, however, he was disappointed, for Isobel was spending the night with friends in Caterham. After some trouble he got the number of the friends, but when he put a call through, he was told that there must be some mistake, Isobel had not been there.

"Curious," commented Rollison, thoughtfully.

"What did you propose to do, sir?" asked Jolly.

"Get help from Miss Crayne," said Rollison, cryptically.

"Do you propose to do anything about the man Owen?" Jolly appeared disinterested in Isobel's nonappearance at Caterham.

"I think we'll murmur a word into the ears of the police about Owen," Rollison said. "There's no reason why we should not be cooperative."

Grice was not at the Yard, but an alert sergeant took his message and promised to see that Owen's record was investigated. Satisfied and apparently in a better humour, Rollison went to bed.

He woke just after seven, and was in his bath before Jolly made tea. At nine o'clock, he telephoned Isobel again, to be told that she was not expected home until eleven o'clock. At nine-fifteen, as he was about to leave the flat, Grice telephoned and wanted to know more about Owen.

"I can't tell you anymore," said Rollison, "except that I told him I thought Cobbett might have been paid to make that mistake with the crane. Since Cobbett was murdered, Owen becomes an obvious suspect. The moment I realised that, I telephoned you."

"The very first moment?" asked Grice, sceptically.

"Yes," said Rollison, "I'm getting trustful, aren't I? Have you learned

anything during the night?"

"No, there've been no developments here," said Grice.

Rollison rang off and went out. He called on an old friend, the vicar of a Mayfair church, and asked him what he knew of Ronald Kemp. He did not expect to see a frown cross the parson's good-natured face.

"What has he been doing?" asked the parson.

"Trying to put the East End to rights in a hurry," said Rollison. "Did you hear about his fight?"

"What fight?" The vicar was amused when Rollison told him, but quickly frowned again. "It isn't out of character with Kemp, Rolly, and yet – well, I hesitate to talk too freely. I suppose I can speak in complete confidence?"

"Yes," said Rollison, and added deliberately: "Either Kemp is in serious trouble, or else he's a very dangerous young man."

"I'll tell you what I know," the Vicar promised.

Kemp had been the curate at a neighbouring church. He was a promising preacher and, to all appearances, sincere in all he said. Then rumours spread, saying that he was a frequenter of nightclubs and that he did not behave as might have been expected of him. He was warned. He gave no explanation, but continued his nightclub visits, and was eventually taken to task by his Bishop, a scholarly man who might well have little patience with the follies of youth.

"A pedant?" asked Rollison.

"And a theologian," said the Vicar. "But I think I am justified in saying that he's out of touch with the modern trend of Christianity. Perhaps another man would have had a greater influence on Kemp. In fact the discussion became heated, and Kemp resigned his curacy immediately."

"Offering no explanation?" asked Rollison.

"Not to my knowledge," said the Vicar. "But there is a man who might be able to give you more information. I'm really telling you what he has told me."

Rollison left, very thoughtful indeed, to visit a Mr. Arthur Straker, a wealthy member of Kemp's Mayfair church. The name seemed familiar, but Rollison did not place it at once.

The man was an urbane, pleasant individual who received Rollison at breakfast in a luxury flat near Hyde Park. Rollison accepted a cup of coffee and explained why he had called. Straker looked intrigued.

"Is that young rebel making trouble again?"

"Rebel?" echoed Rollison.

"There's no other word for Kemp! Had he found his right medium first, instead of coming to a wealthy parish, he might not have been one. Perhaps one should have called him a misfit. It was obvious to me from the start that he would have little patience with orthodoxy. He is not yet old enough to realise that riches and sincerity can go together. Shall I say that he takes many of the passages in the scriptures too literally. 'It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle—'" He paused.

"Yes, I've heard the quotation," said Rollison, drily.

“Kemp read this as meaning that it was impossible for a rich man to behave as a Christian!” went on Straker. “He’s told me so to my face!” He chuckled. “I liked the young scamp, especially for that. Instead of resigning immediately, as I advised him to do, he decided to crusade amongst the vice dens of Mayfair!”

“Oh,” said Rollison, heavily.

“In fact, he got himself into disrepute by visiting unsavoury places and mixing with some of the more hectic young people,” said Straker. “I don’t know that he did himself any harm. Unfortunately, I think he was reproached rather too abruptly about it and refused to try to explain his point of view to the vicar. His point of view was simply that only by knowing what was happening could a bad thing be fought I’m afraid he left the parish in a very tense atmosphere, and took up the curacy of St. Guy’s on the rebound. He went from one extreme to the other, genuinely sincere in wanting to find out how the rest of the world lived. I hope he hasn’t got into serious trouble?”

“He’s giving plenty of people plenty of headaches,” said Rollison, and rose to go. “Do you think there is any likelihood of your being deceived about his good intentions?”

“D’ you mean, was he really sowing wild oats, and using high-sounding motives to explain himself?” Straker asked.

“Yes.”

“It shouldn’t be ruled out as a possibility,” admitted Straker, “but had that been the case, he would have defended himself more – gone to a great deal of trouble to explain himself, because his conscience would have been uneasy. As it was he felt quite clear in his conscience. Since others preferred to impute the worst of motives, he allowed them to imagine what they liked. I like to think that he was more frank with me than anyone else,” added Straker. “I often wondered if I could have been more tactful in my handling of him, but I was convinced almost from the start that he was a misfit here. He has a better chance of finding his level and crusading where he is now.”

Rollison put his head on one side.

“Do you really think so?”

Straker chuckled, urbanely.

They parted on good terms, and Rollison went to Mount Street, where Isobel Crayne lived. She had not yet returned, but he waited for less than ten minutes when she came in tempestuously, flinging her hat down as she entered the hall, calling ‘good morning’ to the maid who opened the door and then stopping, astonished, at the sight of Rollison in the drawing room.

“Why, Rolly – what a surprise!”

“You’re very gay for so early in the morning,” Rollison said. “Have you been places?”

“I’ve had a busman’s holiday!”

“I knew you hadn’t been to Caterham,” said Rollison.

Her smile disappeared and she looked at him in sudden alarm.

“You haven’t told.”

“I haven’t told a soul,” said Rollison. The door of the drawing room was closed and she was looking at him with an intensity which made him begin to worry. But he went on lightly: “I got the Caterham ‘phone number from your mother, but was told that you hadn’t been to Caterham. It was not curiosity,” he added, quickly, “I wanted to talk to you – in fact, I want your help.”

“About what?”

“Ronald Kemp.”

“Then you don’t know—” she began, and broke off.

Rollison watched her frown as she looked out of the window, obviously collecting her thoughts. The sun was striking through the glass and caught one side of her dark hair, filling it with lights. But for her snub nose, she would have been really beautiful, and there was the freshness of youth about her, which gave her so much vitality.

“You’re uncanny, sometimes,” she said abruptly. “I suppose I’d better tell you. I went to St. Guy’s last evening. It was my night off, and Ronald had asked me to spend an evening with him. Rolly, don’t get ideas! I wasn’t sure what time I would get home, so I arranged to stay at a hostel in Mile End Road. We just talked. There’s something magnificent about him, isn’t there?”

“I once thought so,” agreed Rollison.

“Once?” Her forehead wrinkled, and she looked as if she could easily take offence. “I don’t like the way you said that.”

“I’m not going to make myself popular I can see,” said Rollison. “Isobel, when you first came to see me about Kemp, did you know him at all?”

She stared at him in astonishment. “Of course not! Rolly, what are you getting at?”

“I knew this was going to be delicate,” said Rollison. “But I can’t believe you would try to put anything across me.”

Isobel said quietly: “I don’t know what curious idea you have in your head, Richard, but I don’t like the insinuation. I don’t know why you should worry about it, but the truth is that I had heard Ronald Kemp preach in Mayfair once or twice. Later, I heard a rumour that he had left the district in a huff, and I had no idea where he was going. I certainly wouldn’t have come to you had I not thought that you might be able to help him. I had never met him personally.”

Rollison’s eyes twinkled.

“’Richard’ being reproving! Isobel, dear, Ronald Kemp is in a bad spot. The police will probably suspect him of knowing more about the goings on than he professes.”

“Do you mean *you* suspect him?” Isobel demanded.

“All I know is that there’s some circumstantial evidence against him,” Rollison assured her. “I want to try to make sure of his real motives before going any further. That’s where I want your help.”

“I’ll have nothing to do with any trickery where he is concerned!” Isobel declared, hotly.

“Not trickery,” protested Rollison. “A necessary stage in seeing that he

doesn't get clobbered for something he didn't do." He took her hand. "I've grown fond of Ronald Kemp, and really want to help."

"What do you want me to do?" Isobel asked, reluctantly.

"When will you be seeing him again?"

"This evening."

'Tell him that at ten o'clock, in my flat, there is to be a meeting which will solve the whole mystery," said Rollison. "But don't let him know a minute before nine-fifteen."

"I don't think I like it," said Isobel "I think you ought to tell me more about what you're planning."

He told her just what he planned, what Kemp's West End reputation had been, and just why he wanted to make sure that there was no justification for the *canard.* Isobel heard him out without an interruption, and surprised him by speaking with a wealth of contempt.

"You must be *mad,* even to think of such a thing!"

"All I want is evidence that I am mad," said Rollison, mildly.

"And you think Ronald might come to your flat when he knows that everything is being settled tonight?"

"I think it will help to find the truth about him," said Rollison. "You'll amplify that story, of course say I'm interviewing a man, *one* man, who is going to name the chief rogue."

"It sounds beastly," said Isobel.

"Be your age!" exclaimed Rollison. "If Ronald's mixed up in this affair, it's necessary to find out for the sake of a lot of people – especially that of Isobel Crayne! If he isn't, then it doesn't matter a tinker's curse."

"I suppose you're right," Isobel said, reluctantly.

"You'll do it? Good girl!"

"I mustn't tell him before a quarter past nine you say."

"No – nor much later."

"All right," she said.

She did not say that she might not see Kemp, and Rollison assumed that they had a date. If Kemp were innocent, they would make a good couple.

As soon as he reached the flat Rollison telephoned the office, to find that a message had already been received from Cracknell, confirming his appointment to the official inquiry into the whisky racket.

"And what have you in mind for me, today?" asked Jolly.

"The same again," said Rollison. "Try to trace the source of supply in the West End."

"And you will operate in the neighbourhood of St. Guy's, sir?"

"Can you think of a better hole?" asked Rollison.

He was at Bill Ebbutt's gymnasium just after half-past twelve, but nothing of interest had come in. Ebbutt's men were keeping a watch on the Whitings. Next he saw Kemp, in one of the church halls, putting it straight after the police search. He saw the Yard men whom he had asked Grice to send to

follow Kemp; so that was all right. He went on to Craik's shop, which was crowded with customers, then visited East Wharf, where work was going on apace, unloading another cargo.

Owen came across to him.

"Do you know anything, Mr. Rollison?"

"No more than you," said Rollison.

"I wish I could help," said Owen. "What's it about? I *might* be able to strike something if I knew more about it."

"I don't see what you can do," Rollison said, "except tell me what happens to the goods you take off the ships?"

"Most of it's taken to the factories waiting for it," Owen told him. "Some of it goes into warehouses. Why, Mr. Rollison?"

"How are the contents checked? I mean, are the cases opened here, or are they sent off without being opened."

"Oh, they're all marked," said Owen. "I – my stripes! You don't think there's any *smuggling* going on?"

"Could there be?"

"If anything got past me, I'd tear my shirt!" declared Owen. "I don't think it's likely. The Port Authority police haven't warned me, anyhow."

"Will you keep a careful look-out?" asked Rollison.

Owen assured him he would, giving the impression that he was genuinely anxious to help.

Rollison was deliberating on his next move when a fair-haired youngster, barefooted and dressed in a grubby singlet and patched flannel shorts, came racing towards him. The cobbles did not appear to hurt his feet.

"Mr. Ar, Mr. Ar!" he called, and came to a standstill in front of the Toff. "Mr. Ar, Bill ses will you 'phone yon man? He ses you'd know who I mean."

"I do, thanks," said Rollison, gave him sixpence, and went to a telephone kiosk and called Jolly.

"I'm very glad you've come through so quickly, sir. I have discovered Gregson's West End address."

"That's good work," said Rollison. "Where is it?"

"The Daisy Club, in Pond Street," answered Jolly. "I saw him going in, and a little questioning of a cleaner elicited the fact that the man whom we know as Keller is also a frequenter of the club. Another thing, sir – a bottle of the – er – firewater, was delivered by special messenger this morning."

"A bottle?" asked Rollison. "Who on earth—" and then he chuckled. "Oh, yes, I asked one of the girls at the office to buy me a bottle. Any note to say which club it came from?"

"There is a sealed note accompanying it," said Jolly.

"Open it, will you?" said Rollison.

After a pause, Jolly spoke again.

"It is signed: 'Mabel Bundy, Sergeant, sir, and" – there was the slightest unsteadiness in Jolly's voice— "it says that the bottle was bought at the Daisy Club, as requested."

“Have you tried it?” asked Rollison.

“I did venture to taste it, sir. I think it is exactly the same brand as that which you brought from Craik’s shop.”

“So all things point to the Daisy Club,” said Rollison, with satisfaction. “Telephone my office, thank Sergeant Bundy for me, then come along to the Daisy Club.”

“Very good, sir,” said Jolly.

Rollison walked to Whitechapel Tube Station.

There was a faint doubt in his mind, for just as everything had once pointed to the Docker and the church halls, it seemed that they were now pointing to the Daisy Club. But this time, there seemed to have been no effort on anyone’s part to make him pay attention to the place. The purchase of a bottle of the whisky from the club by Sergeant Mabel Bundy was quite unconnected with Jolly’s discovery, and appeared to have been a lucky stroke.

Pond Street was a dingy thoroughfare off Shaftesbury Avenue. ‘*The Daisy Club, Secretary F. Legge’,* was written on a varnished board nailed to the porch at the foot of a flight of narrow stairs, which were fitted with hair-carpet. Jolly was at the far end of the street, and Rollison walked to meet him.

It was then that he received the biggest shock he had yet had in *l’aflaire* Kemp.

In the doorway of a shop, out of sight until he passed it, two plainclothes men were standing. There was nothing unusual in seeing Yard men in Pond Street, but these were the two men whom, not long before, he had seen outside Kemp’s hall.

“What is it, sir?” asked Jolly, as he drew up. “Kemp’s shadows. They might have been given a new assignment,” said Rollison, “but I doubt it.”

They walked past the two Yard men towards the Club, Rollison on edge in case Kemp was upstairs.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

The Curate At The Daisy Club

No one was on the first-floor landing.

Rollison reached it just ahead of Jolly. He looked at three doors facing him, and another flight of stairs. He listened at each of the doors, but heard nothing. Jolly, who had gone ahead, stood at the top of the next flight, beckoning. As Rollison reached him, he heard voices.

One was quite unmistakable.

"You know very well I don't!" growled Ronald Kemp.

He was speaking in one of two rooms leading from the landing. The words '*Daisy Club*' were written on the door, and there was no other notice. The closed door looked flimsy. Rollison stepped closer, standing on one side with Jolly on the other.

The voice of Gregson came next, and Rollison caught Jolly's eye. He hated the implications in Kemp's visit, but forced himself to listen.

"Please yourself," said Gregson. "You may—"

Footsteps sounded from downstairs. Rollison heard them and turned abruptly – and, on the lower landing, he saw the peeling face of Superintendent Grice. He was taken so much by surprise that he missed Gregson's next words, but the shrill ringing of a telephone bell cut them short.

Grice reached the landing.

Gregson said something in a harsh voice; then there was silence in the room.

"Hallo, Rolly!" said Grice, with remarkable heartiness. "I wondered if you'd be here!" He stepped forward and rapped on the door. There was no response, just utter silence.

"You shouldn't have done that," Rollison whispered. "They've been warned."

The door opened abruptly, and Gregson stood on the threshold. Behind him was Kemp; 'Keller', by the window was a third man, who held an automatic pistol. Keller's right hand was in his pocket.

"I shouldn't use those guns," said Grice, mildly.

Gregson swung round on Kemp, his face livid. The curate was staring, as if taken completely unawares.

"You double-crossing swine, you've brought the police. Why, I'd like to cut your throat!"

"That's enough," said Grice.

Then Keller put a bullet between them, and as they backed away, involuntarily, he and Gregson rushed out of the room. Rollison put out his foot. Gregson jumped over it, flinging out his hand and catching Rollison on the side of the head. That alone would not have been enough to put Rollison

out, but the door opposite opened and two other men appeared, both of them carrying coshes. Almost before he knew what was happening, Rollison was in the middle of a furious fight, most of the time keeping off savage blows. He thought Kemp was in the thick of it, too. Grice was stretched out on the floor, and Gregson and 'Keller' had escaped.

Then the fighting stopped.

Jolly had one of the men gripped powerfully and unable to move, and, inside the room, Kemp had knocked the other gunman out. Kemp was looking down at his victim, and Rollison straightened up and smoothed down his coat.

"What the devil *is* going on?" demanded Kemp.

"Don't you know?" demanded Rollison gruffly.

"I don't! I—"

Grice, whom Rollison turned to help to his feet, interrupted him. It was not often that Grice looked angry, but he did now, and his voice held a harsh note.

"I think you know quite enough, Mr. Kemp. What are you doing here?"

"I had a telephone call—" began Kemp.

"I see," sneered Grice. "You had a telephone call asking you to come to the Daisy Club this morning. You'd no idea what you were wanted for – you are just the innocent victim of a hoax?"

Kemp's face drained of its colour.

"That is what happened," he said, coldly.

"I shall take a lot of convincing."

"If you prefer not to believe me, that is your affair," said Kemp, turning to Rollison. "Do you know this man?"

"He's Superintendent Grice, of New Scotland Yard," Rollison said drily.

"I see that the manners of the police are alike from headquarters downwards," said Kemp, bitingly.

Grice ignored the rudeness.

"I have a number of questions to ask you, Mr. Kemp, and will be glad if you will come with me. I am not at this juncture making any charge against you, but you should be warned that anything you say may be used in evidence."

Kemp stared at him, coldly, then swung round on Rollison.

"Are you going to *let* him do this?"

"I'm afraid I can't stop him. But you needn't go, you know, although if you refuse, he may prefer a charge."

From amazement, Kemp's expression became one of anger. He looked as if he could hardly keep his fists to himself.

"So you brought the police here. I have no objection to coming with you, Superintendent." His look suggested that he would have liked to add that he would gladly go anywhere out of sight of Rollison, who did not speak again. Grice, slightly mollified, led Kemp out of the room. Several Scotland Yard men arrived and began to search the premises.

Rollison was aware of Jolly's inquiring gaze.

“Quite a morning, isn’t it, Jolly? The best laid schemes and all the rest of it. No meeting this evening, no catch, no trap. A curious business from the beginning. It’s time we started work!”

One of the plainclothes men looked at him curiously.

“On what, sir?” asked Jolly.

“Disabusing the fixed police mind,” said Rollison. “Oh, a splendid case has been built up against Kemp, and it will take some breaking. Our job is to break it.” He led the way to the deserted street. A car was disappearing round the corner, and against the back window he saw the silhouette of Kemp’s head. He walked in the car’s wake, with Jolly, until they reached Mount Street.

“Are you going to see Miss Crayne?” asked Jolly.

“As a bearer of bad tidings, yes. But also of hope. Come with me, it will save me telling the same story twice.”

Isobel received them in her father’s study, which she used as an office for voluntary work. She was dressed in the familiar W.V.S. green uniform. There was restraint in her smile as she greeted Rollison and nodded to Jolly.

“Is there trouble?” she demanded, before Rollison could speak.

“The police have forestalled us,” said Rollison. “Your young man is in a really nasty spot.”

“Did you—”

“I hadn’t a thing to do with it,” said Rollison hardily. “Kemp was at a particularly hot nightclub – I should say, at its office. He was overheard talking with men who used violence on the police. There couldn’t be much stronger evidence that he was associating with thieves.”

Isobel sat down, slowly.

“There *must* be an explanation,” she said, in a composed voice.

“Kemp was heard talking to them in a familiar manner, and when the police arrived, he was accused by one of them of a double-cross,” said Rollison. “Believe me, the evidence is there. Only the stubborn pride of your young man prevented him from making convincing denials. Pride is his chief shortcoming.”

“Will you *please* say what you mean?”

“Yes indeed,” Rollison promised. “I mean that this morning I didn’t feel too sure of Ronald, but now I’m convinced that he is being very cleverly framed. I think he told the truth when he said that he had been called to the club by telephone, and it was done so that the police should find him there. The other men who matter escaped, and seemed confident that the police won’t find them. They allowed themselves to be seen going in by Jolly, presumably to get me there too. They have realised that the police suspect Kemp, and are doing their best to make sure it goes further. We’ve a big job on our hands, and there isn’t much time to lose.”

“You’re not just saying this to comfort me, I hope,” said Isobel, quietly.

“Now why should I try anything so foolish with a big, fine lass like you! No, this last attempt is so glaringly obvious. Kemp *is* being framed, and it’s up to us to prove it. Do you know the foreman at East Wharf?”

"Owen, you mean? Yes."

"Do you like him?"

"He's quite an inoffensive little man, I would say."

Rollison grimaced. "He wouldn't like to hear you say so, he fancies himself as a he-man, a slave-driver, a – but that doesn't matter! Instead of telling Kemp about the meeting in my flat, tell Owen. He's on the overtime shift tonight, but you'll have to make the opportunity yourself. Can you do it?"

"I'll manage it somehow!"

"That's the girl!" exclaimed Rollison. "Don't let him guess that you've been prompted, drop it into ordinary conversation, but try to make sure that only Owen can hear you. As for time – well, make your own. Whatever time you talk to him, tell him the meeting is due three-quarters of an hour afterwards."

"Why?" asked Isobel.

"Because he might try to break up the party," said Rollison. "If he does, he'll have to work quickly. In short, if he's really involved and alarmed, he'll send some of his boy-friends and there'll be quite a shiny."

"Will *you* be all right?"

"I shall be wonderful!" Rollison assured her. "Don't worry about me! Think of Billy the Bull."

"Oh!" exclaimed Isobel, and began to smile.

"That's the spirit!" said Rollison. "Let's go, Jolly!"

They left Isobel still smiling. On the way to Gresham Terrace, Jolly asked whether Rollison really meant what he had said. Rollison left him in no doubt. He believed Gregson and 'Keller' had seized on his interest in Kemp to fasten guilt on to the curate, whose resentment was likely to create a wrong impression with the police.

"And you're throwing a party tonight," Rollison went on. "Billy the Bull and three or four of the heftier members of Bill's club – feed them well, don't spare the points! If Owen's our man, be ready for him."

"Won't you be there, sir?"

"I don't know," said Rollison, "we haven't been able to plan far ahead in this show yet. I'll make the arrangements with Bill Ebbutt, and the guests will start arriving at any time after seven o'clock."

"I will entertain them as well as I can," Jolly assured him. "If you are right, sir, they are being very clever – almost too clever."

"That's it, precisely," said Rollison. "Too clever by half. I don't believe in such open-handed presents to the police, and when Grice is more himself I think he'll begin to have doubts, although he'll have to go on with the investigation into Kemp. On the whole, it shouldn't do Kemp any harm."

"Provided he gets a clean bill, sir," said Jolly.

"Yes," said Rollison, unsmilingly. "Yes, provided we can clear him. You know one thing."

"What particular thing have you in mind, sir?"

"From the beginning, they wanted to get rid of Kemp. I'm assuming that

he is a victim, and not a conspirator! They tried to drum him out, by ostracising him. That failed. They tried to kill him by accident. That failed – and they realised that if he were murdered, it would mean a tremendous fuss. Then I gave them the idea of making Kemp the scapegoat, and they didn't lose much time. They have always a scapegoat, from the shadowy Keller who might or might not exist. There's always a dummy, be it a person or a place. *Very* clever, Jolly!"

"Yes, sir. Do you think the whisky is brought in at East Wharf and distributed from there?"

"It could be."

"I think you told me you had asked the Superintendent to give special attention to the Irish dock workers, sir – were you serious about that?"

"Partly," said Rollison. "But only because O'Hara and the 'other Irishman' whom Craik mentioned, set me thinking along those lines."

"If Craik has been a party, even to warehousing the whisky," said Jolly, "he might be able to give you information."

"Yes, probably. But the odds are that none of the halls was used to store the stuff. When that theory was exploded much of the case against Craik being hand-in-glove with them was blown sky high."

"I suppose so, sir," said Jolly, reluctantly.

"In other words, your advice is still watch Craik," said Rollison. "Yes. We mustn't forget that he tried to kill himself. You're right, Jolly, he wants watching. Lots of people want watching very closely. And we want to start thinking. If the whisky is unloaded at the wharf, it's probably taken away immediately. Therefore, lorry drivers would be involved. Who does the cartage work for the wharf?"

"A firm named Straker Brothers," said Jolly. "I have seen the name on a number of lorries there."

Rollison paused.

"*Straker* Brothers? Jolly, I haven't been very good – not very good at all," he repeated, softly. "I think perhaps we're getting places! *Straker Brothers*," he repeated. "Jolly, I saw a Mr. Arthur Straker this morning, and he gave Kemp a very good reputation. Curious fact. Mr. Straker lives in South Audley Street. Find out whether he is connected with Straker Brothers, will you? Find out, also, if the same firm do much work for any of the big distilleries. Don't try the police, but otherwise move mountains to find out. *Straker* Brothers," he repeated, and went to the telephone.

After he had dialled a Mayfair number, a courteous voice announced that it was the residence of the Rev. Martin Anstruther. Anstruther, who had been the vicar of Kemp's first church, spoke to him immediately afterwards, and in a quiet, cultured voice, said that he would gladly see Mr. Rollison.

After arranging to go at once, Rollison went to his bedroom, and for the first time in this affair put a loaded automatic into his pocket.

Twenty minutes later, at nearly one o'clock, the gentle-voiced Mr. Anstruther received Rollison in a spacious room, the walls of which were lined with books, and a glance at these showed him that they ranged from

theology to philosophy, including works in ancient Greek and Latin. The room was warm, the carpet soft underfoot, and the furniture heavy but in keeping with the study of a scholar. That the Rev. Martin Anstruther was a scholar was apparent at the first sight of his high forehead and the gentle expression on his lined face. He was an academician, who doubtless had to force himself to take part in the bustle which a church in Mayfair meant for him. There could have been no greater contrast between this man and Kemp.

"How can I help you, Mr. Rollison?" he inquired.

"I'm trying to help a friend of mine," said Rollison. "He once worked with you, sir – a Mr. Ronald Kemp."

"Oh, indeed. And how is he?" There was no animosity in the old, quiet voice.

"Very fit, very energetic – and in trouble," answered Rollison.

"I am afraid that young man will always be in trouble, until he learns discretion," said Anstruther, with a charming smile. "I am afraid that he was rather too boisterous for the curacy here, although I liked him very well. He was surprisingly well-read, and *very* sincere. I thought his unconventional methods were unsuited to this part of London, and yet – I sympathised with him. Had he stayed with me, I think he would have done a great deal of good."

"Why did he go?" asked Rollison.

"There were several reasons," said Anstruther. "The main one was that in his earnest endeavours to root out vice, he laid himself open to grave suspicion of being addicted to it." The old cleric smiled again. "I am afraid that in the world of today, appearances count for too much. Many of my parishioners disliked being guided in their devotions by a man who, it was widely known, spent much time in the haunts of the worldly." There was a hint of irony in his voice. "Finally, I had to ask him to cease his activities, and I am afraid he lost his temper. A very headstrong young man. Pride will be a great disadvantage to him, until he conquers it."

"The deadly sin," said Rollison, smiling.

"No sin is deadly in the young," murmured Anstruther.

"A generous concession," said Rollison. "Who lodged the complaints against him in the first place?"

The old eyes grew sober and gazed at him steadily. Very little passed Anstruther by, thought Rollison, wondering if Anstruther was going to ask him why he wanted to know.

Instead: "Is Kemp in serious trouble?" he asked.

"Very serious indeed."

"And you hope I can help him."

"I do, very much," said Rollison.

Anstruther seemed to go into a brown study, and then said: "Several people told me that he was getting into bad company, and finally Mr. Straker advised me that the feeling against him was so strong that he would either have to cease his activities, or else resign. Mr. Straker's judgment is

rarely at fault. I am quite at a loss to see how the information will help you, Mr. Rollison."

"It might," Rollison said, and stood up.

"Sit down, please," said Anstruther, his gaze so compelling that Rollison obeyed. "I have been frank with you. I hope you will be as frank with me. How can such information help you?"

Rollison pondered, and then said quietly: "I understood from Mr. Straker that you, not he, had insisted on Kemp's resignation. A slip of the tongue, perhaps – or I may have misunderstood him."

"Yes, you might have done. Look after the young man, Mr. Rollison. If there is any other way I can help, please do not hesitate to let me know."

"I won't," Rollison promised, and shook hands.

He felt the influence of Anstruther's words and manner as he walked from the house, but was not so absorbed that he failed to notice that he was being followed. He gave no indication that he knew, but went by a roundabout way to the flat.

The man following him was small and wiry, flashily dressed, and at great pains to pretend that he was interested in everyone but Rollison. He had not been at hand when Rollison had left the flat, nor had he followed him to Anstruther's house, so probably the house had been watched.

It could only be because Straker had wanted to find out whether he pursued his inquiries.

Even then, he did not think that any bare-faced attempt at harming him would be made in Gresham Terrace, although he was wary as he approached his flat, and put his hand to his pocket, gripping a small automatic pistol. A taxi turned into the street and came at a rattling pace towards him. He saw the flashily dressed man motion towards its driver.

The taxi slowed down and a man in the back fired at Rollison through the open window.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

More Of Mr. Straker

Rollison fired back, dodging to one side as he did so. His aim was wide, but so was that of the man in the taxi. As it drew level, two more shots were aimed at Rollison, who aimed more carefully. As the taxi reached the corner, one of the rear tyres burst. The taxi swerved across the road. The flashy man took to his heels. The driver and his passenger jumped from the taxi as it was moving, and raced towards Piccadilly. A dozen people saw the taxi crash against the curb.

Rollison turned towards the flat as Jolly came hurrying from it.

"Keep the police away, if you can," said Rollison, "stall them for ten minutes, anyhow."

"I'll do my best, sir." Jolly hurried towards the scene of the crash, where a man was already pointing towards Rollison while talking to a policeman. Rollison hurried upstairs, and telephoned Grice.

"I've been wanting" began Grice.

"Never mind what you've been wanting," said Rollison, urgently. "A Mr. Arthur Straker lives in South Audley Street. Have him watched closely, and don't let him get away, whatever you do. When you've fixed that, you might send a man to Gresham Terrace to convince the constable who is shortly coming to see me, that I only fired at the taxi in self-defence!"

"Fired? What taxi?" cried Grice. Rollison heard him lift another telephone and say into it: "Come in at once, Bray."

"I think it was the one in which I was taken for a ride the other night," said Rollison. "The driver has escaped. It was a daring attempt to stop me," he went on, "but there isn't time to discuss that now. Do find out what you can about Straker."

"I know quite a lot about Straker already," said Grice, unexpectedly. "He is a director of a firm of cartage and transport contractors, and some of his vans have been used for delivering."

"Whisky!" cried Rollison, exultantly. "What a pity we can't be entirely frank with each other! Anything on Straker himself?"

"No. We've been looking for one of his men."

"Your man is Straker himself," said Rollison confidently. "Ah, here come the coppers. Hustle your sergeant over here, won't you."

"He won't be long," promised Grice.

Rollison replaced the receiver, then looked up into the face of a youthful policeman who had entered with Jolly.

By the time Rollison had made a statement, the sergeant from the Yard had arrived – a clean cut individual who reassured the constable and even congratulated him on using shorthand.

When they had gone, Rollison said to Jolly: "That's Bray, the man who

arrested Craik. Grice is fair."

"Bray is having a chance to rehabilitate himself, presumably," said Jolly, who was obviously thinking of something else. "Do you know what made the men attack you?"

"Yes. A worried Arthur Straker!"

"I thought perhaps that was the case, sir – I have been able to find out that his firm not only serves the East Wharf, but many others nearby, and also has contracts for two firms of whisky distillers. It wouldn't be surprising if we have found the distributors."

"We certainly have," said Rollison, beaming. "Things should move fast now. Grice will have evidence against Straker, but Straker won't know it yet, I shall still be his enemy Number I. There isn't much to do but watch Kemp. They might still try to make him the scapegoat. I should have asked Grice."

He broke off at a ring at the front door. It was Grice who came in by himself.

"Enter the bird of ill omen," greeted Rollison, promptly. "Have you released Kemp, yet? If not, it's time you did."

"We have not," said Grice.

"Have you charged him?" demanded Rollison.

"Not yet," answered Grice.

"You can't hold him much longer in detention, can you? Will you act in defiance of all known laws of the country and common sense and hold on to him until he has a good chance of making you look a fool – which, usually, you're not."

"Aren't you being a bit severe?" demanded Grice. "You first put us on to him."

"Yes, I know," said Rollison. "I thought, and think, that the young man is in great danger. And on second thoughts—" He gave Grice so charming a smile that the Yard man looked taken aback. "You 're a wise old bird, William! A spark of genius makes all Yard men kin! Yes, hold Kemp. If needs be, even charge him – but keep him with you. He'll at least be safe."

"Would you mind talking like a sane man?" demanded Grice.

"*I'm* sane," said Rollison. "Straker knows it, which is his reason for having men in taxis and with firearms. Much evil, much hypocrisy, but some radiance shining through. The power for good is greater than that for evil – but being a policeman, you probably don't think so!"

"Why have you suddenly swung over to Kemp?" demanded Grice.

Rollison told Grice all he had learned, and when he had finished Grice – picking at a piece of peeling skin – spoke thoughtfully.

"You think that Straker first had Kemp sent away from Mayfair, in order to—"

"Not sent away, driven away. He made clever use of Kemp's own chief failing, pride in himself. The same thing that made you jump to the conclusion that he was stalling. Yes, Straker discovered that Kemp was nosing about the clubs and, undoubtedly, Kemp came near to finding out something. So, what happened? Kemp was driven to the East End. Why?

Because Straker, his one friend in the West End, put it to him. Early in this affair he told me that a friend had suggested that he went to see Cartwright – I think we'll find that Straker was that friend. Straker wanted him watched, and also where he could do no harm. Kemp, probably not knowing that he had discovered anything that might be hurtful to Straker & Company, set about his work of reform. His passion for putting the world right got him into trouble again. He came close to making another discovery, although we don't know what. There must be something which he would find in the ordinary course of his parish work.

"Straker must have seen his mistake, and tried to have him driven out, as he felt sure that there would be no danger. Just a fighting parson, without a friend, a failure in society circles, a failure with the lowly. But Kemp has a basic common sense. He made inquiries, discovered that I had a reputation for knowing his district, and came to see me."

Grice laughed. "You aren't without vanity yourself, are you?"

"Who, me?" exclaimed Rollison, in amazement. "Great Scott, *I'm* not proud. Very humble, in fact. As I should be, I was once half-convinced Kemp might be the rogue. However, even if you catch Straker, even if you close up the distribution of the stuff, you haven't found the source of supply. And a lot of problems will remain. For instance, in Whitechapel – someone did *kill* O'Hara, not to mention Cobbett."

"I was wondering how long it would be before you got to that," said Grice, sarcastically. "Your case for Kemp is very plausible, but there seems to be something you don't know."

"Yes? What?"

"Kemp saw Cobbett at the Jupe Street hall. He appears to have been the last man to have seen him alive," said Grice, quietly. "The back door of the hall near East Wharf was opened with a key – your own observation, I gather from Chumley. Kemp was seen in the vicinity, a short while before you discovered Cobbett. The two men who were watching the hall for you, the boxer and his second, saw Kemp, but didn't think that you would be interested in him. Even without the evidence of my own ears and eyes, I should have to question Kemp. I may even have to charge him, and the charge would be the murder of Cobbett. I came here because I wanted to find out if you had any real evidence that I'm wrong."

CHAPTER TWENTY

Disappointment For A Party

"No," said Rollison, after a long pause, "I've nothing tangible. All the same, I hope you won't charge him yet. I think he's been cleverly framed; they've worked faster than I realised. You can at least hold your hand until Straker has been interrogated. Is Kemp restive?"

"Very!"

"I'll see him," said Rollison. "I think I can keep him quiet. Don't act too soon, Bill."

"I can see the day out," said Grice, slowly.

"I'm sure you won't regret it. Jolly, ring up Miss Crayne, find out if she's still at home, and ask her to come here at once. If she isn't in, find out where she is. Have you traced Gregson and the man who might be Keller yet?" he asked Grice.

"No."

"Thinking back a little, the man whom we've never been able to find is the shadowy individual who first called himself Keller, the doer of evil deeds with a praiseworthy motive, the man who committed crimes for the sake of goodness. But he killed O'Hara, and killed Cobbett. You've still got the man Harris under charge, haven't you?"

"Yes."

"Go hard at him. He might know who Keller is. Have his friend, Spike Adams, questioned on the same lines. Trail the foreman, Owen. Get hold of the drivers of Straker's lorries and have a go at them. The presumption is that the whisky is brought to East Wharf and other wharves, and a little at a time is distributed from there, probably to a lot of warehouses. It's obviously distributed to clubs and pubs quickly, so there is never a hoard in any one place at any one time. That's an essential part of the whole scheme, you know. The police wouldn't be likely to worry about a few dozen bottles at a time. Will you get busy?" He spoke appealingly.

"When I've decided what's worth doing," Grice promised. "I'm not convinced that you're right."

Grice left, in a subdued mood.

Jolly had hardly reported to Rollison that Isobel was on the way, before she arrived. She was in uniform and hatless.

"Kemp is safe for the time being," Rollison told her. "He'll stay safe only if you and I can persuade him to stay at Cannon Row police station for the rest of the day."

"Are you going to let him down *again*?" demanded Isobel.

"Oh, my sainted aunt!" moaned Rollison. "Isobel, love, I'm on his side. I tell you the only safe place for him is in the police station."

He convinced her at length, and soon they were in the little room at

Cannon Row, where detained persons were held. Any solicitor could get them out, unless they were held under charge. Kemp was not sullen but he was bitter, and he appeared to have little time for Rollison, until Isobel persuaded him that Rollison was working for his best interests.

Rollison said: "You could go free, but more likely the police would charge you with some offence, so as to hold you. If they let you go, you'll be in greater danger than ever. And this is no time for saying that you can stand on your own two feet. You might get a satisfying sop to your vanity and a fillip to your physical courage, but you're the key to the problem. We can't solve it without you, so we need you aliReluctantly, Kemp agreed.

"I'm sure you won't regret it," enthused Rollison. "Now, think as you have never thought before, what do you know of Arthur Straker, at your first church?"

"He was the only man who ever gave me the slightest support," said Kemp. "What do *you* know about him?"

"Nothing," said Rollison, promptly. "I'm just checking that you think he's reliable."

"I am *quite* sure," insisted Kemp.

"Good. Do you know who telephoned asking you to go to the club this morning?"

"It was the man who calls himself Gregson," said Kemp. "I had been there before – I once tried to get the club closed down, but I couldn't convince the police that it was necessary. While I was there, I saw a number of people taken ill after drinking whisky. Gregson used to tell me that he did his best to make sure he got hold of quality stuff only, and he rang up this morning and said he thought I would be interested to know that he had discovered how the poison reached him. So I went. When I got there, he asked me whether I made a profit out of helping to distribute it, and then when the police arrived I think he *knew* you were outside – he made the conversation sound pretty incriminating. If the police hadn't been so arbitrary—"

Rollison smiled.

"You aren't the world's most tactful suspect, you know! Unbend now. Unbend as far as you know how. The police don't want to see an innocent man convicted." Without waiting for Kemp to respond, he went on: "One other thing. Did young Cobbett – the crane driver – come to see you an hour or so before he was killed?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"He seemed badly upset," said Kemp. "Very remorseful about the accident. I told him not to worry. As a matter of fact, Rollison, I think you were wrong about him."

"Make sure you tell the police that. Even if you appear to be incriminating yourself, tell them everything. After all," he added, "you don't want to break Isobel's heart!"

Then he left Kemp and Isobel together.

He did not think it would be long before he knew the whole truth, and at

the back of his mind there was an exasperating suspicion that he had missed something so obvious that when eventually he discovered what it was, he would be annoyed with his own blindness.

He was most concerned with Cobbett's murder. That had been a clever trick, which could still put Kemp in the dock on a capital charge. Doubtless Cobbett had been sent to apologise, to allay the curate's suspicions; then had been killed near a place where Kemp would be the obvious suspect.

"And who told Cobbett?" Rollison asked himself. "Owen?" Owen had made no move during the day to suggest that he was involved. The East End was like a city of the dead. There was a furtive, hang-dog look about most of the people whom he did see, and there were more policemen in plainclothes about than was usual.

Passing Craik's shop, he saw the little man through the open doorway – the broken panel of the door had been replaced. Craik called after him timidly, and he turned, to see the shopkeeper standing on the doorstep rubbing his hands.

"I don't like worrying you, sir," said Craik, his lips quivering. "But – but *is* it true that Mr. Kemp has been arrested?"

"No," said Rollison, emphatically.

"Oh, it isn't! Oh, I *am* glad!" exclaimed Craik. "I was afraid it was true, this is such a wicked affair, sir. It – it seems to affect all the best-meaning people. He hasn't been seen since this morning."

"He doesn't have to stay here all the time," observed Rollison, annoyed by this leakage of information. "Who told you anything about it?"

"One of my customers," said Craik.

"Which one?" demanded Rollison.

Craik could not be sure. The shop had been crowded in the morning, and the subject had cropped up in general conversation. He would not name any individual, for fear of doing injustice. Pressed, he admitted that he had been so rushed that he had not really noticed who had been in the shop. He remembered old Mrs. Whiting, because she had appeared to think that Kemp might be guilty of some crime.

"I soon put her in *her* place," said Craik, virtuously.

"And so you should," said Rollison. "Has the story of Kemp's arrest got around much do you know?"

"I'm sure I couldn't say," Craik answered. "I know I haven't said anything!"

Rollison, feeling sceptical of these protestations, went to 49, Little Lane. Whiting was out, but his wife was there, and two of Ebbutt's men were on the other side of the street. Mrs. Whiting, looked troubled, asked Rollison in and then turned on her mother, who came tottering into the front parlour.

"There's no need for you, Ma!"

"I got my rights, ain't I?" demanded the old woman. "What's worrying you, now," she shot a venomous glance at Rollison.

The younger woman looked on edge, but made no further attempt to send her mother about her business.

"I've heard a rumour about Mr. Kemp—" Rollison began.

"There you are," put in the old crone. "I knew it wasn't a lie, just because you said it was. I don't care what you say, *I'm* going to tell Mrs. Parsons, and —"

"If you say a word to her or any other mealy mouthed old gossip, out of this house you go!" cried Mrs. Whiting, and her tone so startled her mother that the old woman sat down abruptly, gaping. "It's wicked, it is really, Mr. Rollison," went on Mrs. Whiting, nearly in tears. "Someone has been saying that Mr. Kemp is under arrest."

"It isn't true," Rollison assured her.

The little woman's face became positively radiant.

"Oh, I *am* glad! You see?" She shot a triumphant glance at her mother.

"Where did you hear it, Mrs. Whiting?" Rollison asked. "Joe Craik told me – and *he* ought to know," declared the old crone.

"Did it come from him personally?" asked Rollison.

"From his own lips. I was the only one in the shop, and he made me promise not to breathe a word," the old woman said. "But he didn't mean I wasn't to tell my best *friends!"*

Rollison said, slowly: "It's much better that no one should know – you were quite right, Mrs. Whiting. You're sure no one has been told?"

The younger woman said feelingly: "I haven't let Mother go out since she told me. I didn't mean to let a scandal like that get around, because I knew the minute she told Mrs. Parsons."

"You leave your mother's friends alone," complained the older woman.

"Mrs. Parsons and I are old friends," said Rollison.

"P'raps she is, and p'raps she ain't!" snorted the old woman, and flounced out.

"You're so good with the old people, sir," Mrs. Whiting said. "I do wish she wouldn't talk so much. Sometimes I think she's as bad as Mrs. Parsons. Why, only this afternoon."

For the first time, Rollison heard of the conversation between Craik and Cobbett the crane driver, and the fact that Cobbett had appeared sincerely anxious to make amends. He wondered whether Grice or Chumley had heard the story.

After leaving Mrs. Whiting, he telephoned four people, to find out whether any of them knew of the rumour about Kemp's arrest. They did not.

He stepped out of the kiosk, walked past Craik's shop, and returned to Gresham Terrace by bus and tram, hoping that his movements were watched. He was on the look-out for further assaults, but none came. It looked as if Straker had shot his bolt.

Smiling to himself, he reached the flat and rang the bell.

He was rubbing his hands, not unlike Joe Craik, when Jolly admitted him.

"Now, we won't be long!" said Rollison.

But his mood changed, for Jolly looked troubled, and Grice appeared from behind him, looking very grim. Then Isobel appeared from the drawing

room. She looked angry, hair dishevelled and face shiny. “When *are* you going to make the police see sense?” she demanded.

“What’s wrong now?” asked Rollison.

“Everything’s wrong,” exclaimed Isobel.

“What is it?” Rollison asked Grice. “And let’s sit down and have a drink. Jolly!”

They relaxed a little as they sat down.

“At least we’ve got Straker,” reported Grice. “The first crack came from the man Harris, but we also caught the taxi driver, and the flashy man who followed you. He had received his orders from Straker personally.”

Rollison began to smile.

“So, they were panicking, I hoped they were when the taxi turned into the street. One grain of truth from Anstruther completely upset the applecart. Have you held Gregson and the others?”

“No,” said Grice. “I—”

“Tell him!” Isobel almost shouted.

“Now what *is* all this?” demanded Rollison, as Jolly came forward with a laden tray.

Grice said: “We’ve questioned every man we’ve caught. Gregson isn’t among them, nor is Keller, nor is the unknown man in Whitechapel – if one exists. They all say the same thing – that Kemp is involved down there.”

“Do they, b’God,” said Rollison.

“They must be lying!” exclaimed Isobel.

“The fact remains that we have a detailed story about practically everything,” said Grice. “We know how the whisky was stored, how it was distributed, and where it was made. Straker is in it up to the hilt, and so are the others whom we’ve caught – and all of them implicate Kemp. What is more, Straker says that Cobbett discovered that Kemp was involved, and went to blackmail him.”

“Oh,” said Rollison, again. “Cunning on the part of Cobbett – a public conversation with Craik, so as to put himself in a good light, then a little gentle blackmail. There’s one obvious reason for all accusing fingers pointing at Kemp,” he went on. “They’re still covering someone else. There can’t be any other explanation. What are you going to do?”

“What *can* I do but act on the evidence?” asked Grice.

“Rolly, I just don’t believe that Ronald’s concerned in this,” said Isobel, passionately. “Can’t you do anything?”

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

The Malice Of Man

"I'm certainly going to do something," said Rollison, after a long pause. "Does Kemp know the latest facts?"

"Not yet."

"When he's told, keep him away from Straker! The malice of men is an ugly thing. Straker is going down, and wants to pull everyone else with him, especially Kemp, who blundered in with his crusade. When you come to think of it, that's not been a failure."

"Why are you standing there talking?" demanded Isobel, sharply. "How can you disprove what Straker says?"

"By finding the truth," said Rollison. "I think we can. Don't look so down in the mouth, my love!" He turned to Grice. "Bill, can you have a strong cordon of police flung round the Jupe Street area, including East Wharf? Not one man here and there, but a really large party, so that if there's a concerted rush to break away your chaps can stop it. By now, whoever is working down there will have heard of the trouble and won't want to stay for long. I mean Gregson and might be Keller, of course."

"If you can give me—"

"More tangible evidence? I can't, but it stands to reason that both men will be in that neighbourhood. All the trouble has been centred round there. You've had the whole district combed out; it isn't asking much, surely, to do this."

"Can't you be more explicit?" asked Grice.

"No," said Rollison. "Chumley warned them of the danger, so they're in hiding. Now they're shouting 'Kemp', to sidetrack us. If we tell them where we are concentrating the next attack, they'll get out of the area. So neither you nor anyone else should know where the next attack will be concentrated – yet."

"Do you mean *you* know?" asked Grice.

"I think so. And so should you – you've had access to the evidence! And of course I might be wrong, and I'd hate to spoil my reputation! *Am* I asking so much?" he added, appealingly." You went for Straker, and lo! You were rewarded."

"All right," said Grice, and stepped to the telephone.

"Rolly—" began Isobel.

"Hush!" said Rollison. "It's time for action. Talking's over."

"Do you really think there's a chance?"

"We shall have your Ronald out of this spot before very long, and Straker Brothers in a very much deeper one. Perhaps even the proprietors of East Wharf, too. I suppose it's no use asking you to go and see your friends at Caterham?" he added, hopefully. "You owe them a visit and an apology."

"I'm coming with you," said Isobel, firmly.

"I was afraid you were. But for Kemp's sake, do as I ask. He won't want you a corpse, and there *is* deep malice, not only in Straker but in the others. Kemp has completely upset their plans. He started them on the downward path and, by George, he's seeing them drop into the River Styx itself! They hate him, as they've already proved, but why should they have a chance to wreak vengeance on you? Take out your mobile canteen. Go down there to the East Wharf area, where you'll get a grandstand view."

Isobel still hesitated.

"Go with Miss Crayne, Jolly," ordered Rollison, and smiled approvingly when his man said: "Of course, sir," without even looking disappointed.

Isobel and Jolly went off. Rollison looked at his watch: it was just after five o'clock.

Grice returned from the telephone.

"That's done," he said. "I hope you know what you're talking about."

"So do I," said Rollison, as they started downstairs. "I don't think there's much doubt, Bill. The original Keller, the good old original director of operations on the Whitechapel front – that's the man we're after. The imaginary Keller, doer of good deeds."

"What do you mean?" demanded Grice.

"Obviously, sooner or later you were going to wonder whether *Kemp was* taking the law into his own hands," went on Rollison. "That's why they had him lured down to Whitechapel. It wasn't my fault only that you suspected Kemp – they've been leading up to it for a long time. And their case against him will probably be pretty strong."

"It is," said Grice. "Straker has crossed the *t*'s and dotted the *i*'s."

"Yet he didn't convince you?"

Grice did not answer until he was at the wheel of his car and driving away from the kerb. Then he said: "I'm open to conviction. You've done pretty well in a few days – and we'd been after Straker for weeks. If you're right about one thing, why not another?"

"Oh, what a generous heart!" beamed Rollison. "We really should work together more. By the way, do you know who the real Keller is? The man who killed O'Hara? The man who sent Cobbett to apologise to Kemp and afterwards murdered him?"

"No. Do you?"

"Yes. But you haven't heard all the evidence. The rumour that Kemp was under arrest got round. I denied it, but didn't explain that he had been detained for questioning. It could only have reached Whitechapel *vide* police – who can be ruled out – or the crooks themselves. But the rumour wasn't widespread. Few people knew of it when Joe Craik told me. I went along to see the Whitings, the old hag of which family was sizzling with impatience to go round and spread the news, but her daughter had stopped her. Craik told me that he had heard it from one of his customers, but the only one who appears to have known of it was the Whitings' *grandmere,* who said that Craik told her. She has a garrulous friend, a Mrs. Parson, who has a

reputation for spreading news quicker than anyone else. Had Mrs. Parsons heard about it, then it would have got everywhere. The gallant Mrs. Whiting prevented that, and so gave me the answer."

"Craik?—" exclaimed Grice.

"Craik himself, yes. He made one mistake – he relied on the Whitings' mother to tell Mrs. Parsons. He thought it safe to say he had heard from the neighbours, but thanks to Mrs. Whiting, no one else knew."

Grice said, slowly: "Apart from the fact that we first arrested him and let him go, what real grounds have you for saying this, Rolly? He did try to kill himself, didn't he?"

"I thought so, and I said so. Very clever fellow, Craik. But although I actually saw him in bed, holding the gas tube, there was one piece of evidence that I missed. Behind the bed was a hole in the wainscotting. When I found that I thought it was used to store his poison, assuming he was a secret drinker. Actually, it would have been easy for him to have staged a suicide attempt while holding the end of the tube to the wainscotting, so that the gas went out into the street. There was a smell of gas above the shop, but none inside it, the point I missed at the time. Craik told one or more of his customers he would be open, then closed up. He knew that anything unusual would quickly reach Kemp's ears, and wanted to be 'seen' in the middle of a suicide attempt. Pretty smart, wasn't it?"

"If you're right, he's capable of anything."

"Of all that's happened, yes. Of course, O'Hara knew that he was a party to the crime, that's why Craik killed O'Hara, with his own knife. Then he had to make it look as if he were being framed. First, the threats against the Whitings, to stop Whiting from talking. Then, a message through Harris, who admitted having stolen the knife – you can bet he was handsomely paid for that 'confession'! Next, information leaked to Chumley through the unknown Keller, a man who doesn't exist but who has been built up to create the right impression."

'"What about the man who calls himself Keller?" demanded Grice.

The rest of the journey to Whitechapel passed in silence.

At the far end of Jupe Street stood the W.V.S. mobile canteen, with a view of the street and of the wharf. The wharf appeared very busy, and Grice drove past Craik's shop and to the wharf, where a tight-lipped Chumley appeared.

"Is everything set?" asked Grice.

"Yes, sir," said Chumley, sending a resentful look at Rollison. "When do you want the men to close in?"

"We won't necessarily want them to close in," said Rollison. "We want to make sure that no one can get out. Isn't that right, Superintendent?"

"Yes," said Grice.

"Perhaps you wouldn't mind telling me who I ought to be looking for," said Chumley, sarcastically.

"Gregson and Keller, of whom you have descriptions," said Grice. "And the man who let himself be talked of as Keller."

“I think that was Kemp,” declared Chumley.

“That’s what you were intended to think,” said Grice. “Mr. Rollison and I are going to Craik’s shop. Have two or three of your men keeping an eye open there.”

“Craik!” gasped Chumley.

“The man Sergeant Bray arrested, and whom you later released,” murmured Rollison.

Grice turned the car and drove to Craik’s shop. He and Rollison hurried into the shop, catching Craik by surprise as he stood behind the counter with a thin knife in his hand. It was poised over some tinned pork, for two waiting customers.

“Why, good afternoon!” said Craik, round-eyed. “I hope—”

“It’s no use, Keller,” said Rollison. “We know who you are.” He was almost taken by surprise by the other’s speed. Craik swung his right arm, slicing the air with the knife. Rollison backed swiftly, picked up a tin from the counter and flung it. The customers screamed. The tin caught Craik on the side of the head and made him stagger against the shelves. Rollison darted through the gap in the counter and to the stairs. By the time two of Chumley’s men were holding Craik, and Grice was coming after Rollison, there were footsteps above their heads. Rollison put his shoulder to the door of the back-bedroom and broke it down. As he stood aside, a bullet came from the window.

“Look out!” he shouted.

He could not see into the room as he stood against the door, taking his automatic from his pocket. Then the door swung back a little, and he saw two men by the window, one climbing out, and the other – Keller – standing still, his gun pointing towards the door.

Rollison tired through the crack.

The shot went wide but distracted Keller’s attention. Rollison pushed the door open wider and fired as the other tried to reach the window. Keller lost his grip on his gun, and Grice leapt at him, but by then Gregson was out of sight.

Rollison looked out of the window down into the narrow yard.

Gregson was standing in the middle of it, not certain what to do. Two plainclothes men were approaching rapidly. Gregson turned and made as if to enter the shop by the kitchen door, but two more policemen entered the yard from there. Gregson looked right and left desperately, but there was nothing he could do. Rollison called down to him.

“Make up your mind, Gregson!”

The vicious expression on Gregson’s face was made absurdly meaningless as the police closed on him from both sides.

Rollison turned back to the room.

Keller, who was not badly wounded, was glaring at him. His fine brown eyes were filled with malignance, but he no longer looked impressive.

“Now all we need to know is why they were so anxious to frame Kemp,” Rollison said.

"Surely because he could lead to Straker," Grice suggested. "Much more likely that Kemp actually knew something without realising its significance," said Rollison.

He broke off outside the door of the bedroom where he had seen Craik apparently on the point of killing himself. On the bed were several books, which looked like ordinary ledgers. He went closer. One was marked:

St. Guy's Poor People's Relief Fund.

Another was marked:

Church Reconstruction.

A third:

Church Accounts.

"Now what have you found?" demanded Grice.

"The thing we wanted, I think," said Rollison, opening one of the pages. "Yes – end of fiscal year for St. Guy's – July 31st. In about a week, the accounts would have had to be shown. *Honorary Treasurer – Joseph* Craik, Esq." He turned over some of the pages, smiling oddly. "Many, many entries," he went on. "Almost certainly the records of the whisky transactions." As the old Vicar was so ill, Craik had everything under his own control. This looked quite safe, until Kemp came along. The day was fast approaching when Kemp would want to see the accounts. Falsified accounts – not smaller, but infinitely larger than they had any right to be. Obviously it was essential that Kemp should not come across them until dummy accounts had been made up. "You certainly find him everywhere," Rollison added, heavily.

"Find who?" asked Grice.

"The Devil," said Rollison. "Ever heard of him?"

"You're an unpredictable fellow," remarked Grice. "I wish—"

What he wished was not voiced, for there were hurried footsteps outside, and a man burst through the shop. As he did so, there were sounds from further away, shouting, crashing, banging noises, as if Bedlam had been let loose.

"What is it?" called Grice.

"There's trouble at the wharf, sir!" gasped the man. "Some of the dockers have started a riot – there's hell-let-loose, sir!"

"Nothing unpredictable about me," said Rollison, as they rushed downstairs. "You can guess what's happened?"

Grice did not answer, but ran through the shop, where Craik was standing with his lips quivering, already handcuffed. Grice flung himself into his car and Rollison scrambled in as it moved off. As they approached the end of Jupe Street and the wharf, he saw that the mobile canteen was in the middle

of a heaving mass of people. Standing inside it, with Isobel, Jolly was lashing out with what looked like a tea-urn.

The loudest of the voices had an Irish brogue.

"Someone spread the rumour that the canteen attendants were demanding the sack for the Irish," a nearby policeman said. "If they get hold of Miss Crayne—"

Rollison's face was bleak.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

"Let's Blame The Irish"

The police among the seething mass were heavily outnumbered. Bricks and stones and staves of wood were being used, heads were being cracked, and now and again a part of the crowd surged forward as people fell, with arms and legs waving, voices screeching in fear and terror. Nearer the wharf, a horse and cart was standing, and the horse was squealing with terror, and rearing up.

Grice drove as near as he could.

"We'll have to walk," he said.

"Walk if you want to," said Rollison, white faced. He was more than a hundred yards from the canteen and he knew that Jolly would not be able to stand out much longer. The main attack was undoubtedly directed towards the canteen. Buns and sandwiches were being flung in all directions, and cups and saucers were hurtling through the air.

Grice got out.

Rollison slid into his place and raced the engine, startling the people nearest him. They scrambled out of his way. He edged the car forward, and Grice appeared at the other door, suddenly, and climbed in again. A man cuffed his head, another caught his finger in the door as it slammed, and howled with pain. Grice opened the door, and caught a glimpse of a man's thumb, dripping blood, and a face which had gone white. The face dropped away. Rollison drove the car faster, bumping three people out of the way. He wound up his window as someone smashed a stave against it. Grice locked his door. The surging crowd surrounded the car, but Rollison would not let them stop him. When half-a-dozen people put their weight against the radiator and the bumper, he raced the engine and forced them aside. Men clung to the running board, one sitting on the bonnet, battering at the windscreen with his fists. Rollison ignored him, craned his neck and managed to keep the canteen in view.

A giant with a crop of red hair was leaning over the counter, and had caught Jolly's wrist. He was trying to pull Jolly into the crowd. Isobel was battering at his head with an enamel jug. A second man clutched her wrist, and she snatched up a knife from behind the counter.

The man let go.

"Good for Isobel!" said Rollison.

The canteen was still twenty-five yards away and the crush around it seemed to be too great even for the car to get through. Tight lipped, he sent two men down; they were dragged aside. The crowd swayed away and he was able to make another ten yards; then another ten.

The red-haired man had disappeared, but two others were tugging at Jolly, and now one man had his fingers buried in Isobel's hair. Not far away,

someone was swinging a stick, but he was a short fellow, whom Rollison could not see properly. He seemed to be battering his way towards the canteen. Two uniformed policemen were battling towards it.

The car reached the canteen, drawing up only two yards away from it. A dozen people were battering at the doors. Tight lipped and pale, Rollison drew his automatic.

"Be careful!" Grice snapped.

"Careful be damned!" Rollison brandished the gun, and it was enough to make the nearer men back away. He opened the door and leapt towards the canteen counter. Using the gun as a club, he cracked it on the heads of the men tugging at Jolly, forcing them to relinquish their grip. He struck the man who was pulling Isobel's hair and heard the crack of the blow. The man dropped back, and Isobel drew away, brushing the hair out of her eyes.

Rollison vaulted over the counter, nearly knocking Jolly over, and swung round, pointing the gun at the crowd. Grice joined in, the four of them a tight fit inside the canteen.

There were hundreds of men in front of them, roaring, swearing, cursing.

Above the din, Rollison could hear the stentorian voice of Foreman Owen. It was he who was brandishing the stick and forcing his way up. He burst through, and turned to face the crowd.

"Get back to work, you . . ." he roared. "Get back. If a mother's son of you stays another minute, I'll—"

What he was going to add was drowned in another roar, but it was caused by a different crowd, coming down Jupe Street – and, in the van, Rollison saw Billy the Bull and Bill Ebbutt. The members of the gymnasium club were coming in a solid phalanx, pushing everyone before them. Soon, the malice of the crowd was turned towards them.

By now, the police had been reinforced and were appearing along side streets and from the wharf. Rollison, gasping for breath, watched the riot subside as the men began to slip away, many returning to the wharf. Owen chased after them, yelling his head off.

Rollison turned to Isobel.

"There's your mild little man," he remarked.

Isobel laughed, in spite of herself. Her face was scratched and a few strands of hair had been torn out, but she was not seriously hurt. Jolly had an ugly gash in his right cheek, and his wrists were swollen, but he was smiling as he watched the crowd moving away.

"I was getting a little perturbed, sir," he admitted.

"I was scared stiff!" said Rollison. "I bet Kemp will be sorry he missed this one. He's in the clear, by the way."

Isobel stared.

"By the way!" she echoed.

"Well, in a manner of speaking," smiled Rollison. "He'll be out within an hour, I should think. Eh, Bill?"

"Yes," said Grice. "Why on earth did this begin?"

“As I understand it, sir,” said Jolly, “there was a sudden outburst of trouble at the wharf. A party of Irish were abused by some of the others, and that started a free fight. It spread very quickly – the Irish have a reputation for being bellicose, as you probably know.”

Grice frowned. “The Irish—”

“Oh, let’s blame the Irish, by all means!” said Rollison, taking out cigarettes and proffering them. “But let’s be serious, Bill. The fact that a police cordon had been flung round a wide area leaked out – as it was bound to. Craik and the others tried a diversion. There’s bad blood between some Irish dockers and some English, and it never takes much to start a fight, as Isobel and I saw the other evening,” he added.

“There are often scuffles,” admitted Isobel.

“Yes. The easiest way to start a row is for an Englishman to call an Irishman in England a neutral,” went on Rollison. “Our pretty bunch had always tried to draw attention to the wharf and the Irish workers. Today, they had a new idea, and tried to cause trouble for Isobel. However, the distraction didn’t work; we went to Craik too quickly.”

“Craik!” exclaimed Isobel.

Rollison smiled, but Grice did the explaining, for Rollison was suddenly besieged by members of the club, who wanted to know what it was all about.

The whole story, checked and crosschecked, was not known for the better part of a week, but the essentials were known before the following day was out.

Every effort had been made to make it appear that the illicit whisky came in at East Wharf, whereas it was actually made at several depots of Straker Brothers Cartage and Transport Company. The depots were also distribution points, throughout the country. Crates of the illicit whisky were delivered with the genuine cases, but since the buyers knew where to look for it, there had been no danger of that fact leaking out.

From the beginning, Craik had been in charge of the Whitechapel district. Gregson’s companion was named Keller, but the name had also been used by Craik to cover an imaginary character behind which he could hide, and which had been planned, would help to frame Kemp. Gregson and the real ‘Keller’ had been the managers for the whole of the East End, going further afield in some cases, and also handling the West End sales from the Daisy Club. Craik had used the St. Guy’s records to cover his own, thinking that he would not have to show them until Cartwright was better, and always putting off making dummy church accounts. The arrival of Kemp had put Craik in danger, but Kemp had first been a threat in the West End.

Straker had believed him to be working on it because he suspected who was behind it – a suggestion which Kemp dismissed airily, on the following morning.

“I had no idea he was in any kind of racket. He had always impressed me as

being a very sound fellow."

"As did Craik," said Rollison.

Kemp frowned. "Ye – es. Oh, I know they hoodwinked me, but Craik always seemed such a sincere little man, timid as they come."

"Moral – don't confuse timidity with humility," advised Rollison, sitting back in his favourite chair. "The truth was that you prod-nosed to such good effect that you had them badly worried. As you were likely to be much easier to handle in the East End, Straker did a little sales talk, and there you went. The question is – are you sorry you went to St. Guy's?"

"Great Scott, no!" cried Kemp. "I wouldn't be anywhere else for the world!"

"You mean that?"

"I do," said Kemp, fervently. "I don't mind admitting that I decided to go down there feeling something of a martyr and with a great spirit of self-sacrifice, but—" He shrugged. "Give me people like Billy the Bull, Bill Ebbutt, the Whitings – oh, there are hundreds of them. D'you know, Rolly, since I've been down there and seen the conditions under which they live, the marvel is that they are such a decent bunch."

"My way of thinking for a long time," said Rollison.

"The trouble is, there's such a gulf between them and the rest of London. I mean—"

"No gulf that can't be crossed," said Rollison. "Our job is to help 'em bridge it. It'll be nice to have some help, eh, Isobel?"

"You don't need much help," declared Isobel Crayne.

"Oh, come! Without Jolly I'd be lost – wouldn't I, Jolly?"

"I very much doubt it, sir," said Jolly coming in with a tea-trolley, "but it is always a great pleasure to work with you on these little excursions – or, one might say, these aberrations from the normal."

"Yes, mightn't one?" murmured Rollison.

"Oh, did I tell you?" asked Kemp, shortly afterwards, munching a muffin with a great show of nonchalance, and carefully avoiding Isobel's eye, "Isobel and I have decided that as we're both rather fond of the district and the people, and two together can probably do much more than one – I mean – well, we've decided."

"Fast workers, both of you," smiled Rollison. "I'm delighted. The others will be, too."

"Others?" asked Isobel.

"All your little brothers and sisters East of Aldgate Pump!" said Rollison, grandly.

On the Sunday morning following the riot, he went to St Guy's with Jolly, and took up a stand at a point of vantage near the entrance to the churchyard. Keeping out of sight behind some shrubs, he watched the cavalcade approaching. Rarely had the narrow streets been so crowded at that hour.

Children with red and shining faces and shoes newly cleaned, women heavily made-up and wearing all their finery, men with carefully brushed

hats, newly pressed suits and highly polished shoes, all followed on. Many of them had a self-conscious air, but not the Whitings, who were glowing with happiness, nor Owen, who was never likely to feel out of place.

Jolly nudged Rollison.

Striding along with his diminutive second was Billy the Bull, wearing an old-fashioned bowler hat with a curly brim, light brown shoes and a bright blue suit. Now and again, he looked over his shoulder, almost furtively. Nearby was Bill Ebbutt, his face now almost normal, with his wife, in 'Army' uniform, striding out beside her – she looked as if she would soon burst into huzzahs. Red-haired Irishmen, puny-looking Cockneys, dark-skinned lascars and almond-eyed Chinese, mixed freely with the others.

Rollison nudged Jolly.

Walking alone, and certainly self-conscious but putting a bold face on it, was Inspector Chumley.

Soon afterwards, a taxi drew up and from it alighted the venerable figure of the Rev. Martin Anstruther. After him, hurrying with the stragglers, came Isobel, in her W.V.S. uniform. She went inside, breathlessly.

"A good show," murmured Rollison. "We'll be lucky to find a pew."

They did not find one, but chairs from one of the halls had been brought in. The sidesmen were busy, bustling and perspiring, and one hoped Rollison and Jolly would not mind sharing a hymnal. Soon, the Rev. Ronald Kemp began to take the service. His powerful voice was pitched low, as if he were also self-conscious. His damaged eye was no longer badly swollen, but was of many colours. When at last he went into the pulpit and began his sermon, he chose to preach on pride – the deadliest of sins; and he did not pull his punches. As he talked, his voice grew more powerful and he completely lost himself.

Afterwards, Anstruther caught a glimpse of Rollison, and smiled and cocked a thumb, a surprising gesture from the old man. Isobel was beaming. The grande dame of the Whiting family declared audibly, and with a sniff, that he could preach – and she supposed that was something.

Chumley hung back until he saw Rollison.

"I'm sorry we didn't see eye-to-eye, Mr. Rollison," he began.

"Bygones are really bygones," declared the Toff. "You and Kemp ought to swap ideas."

"He'll probably force his on me!" said Chumley, wryly. "And so," said Rollison to Jolly, as they made their way homewards, "everything in the garden is lovely, until Old Nick pops his head up again."

Jolly smiled, benignly.

"If I may use the expression, sir, I think that when he does, Kemp will dot him one vigorously. Don't you agree sir?"

Series Information

Published or to be published by
House of Stratus

Dates given are those of first publication

Gideon Series

(Writing as JJ Marric)

These Titles can be read as a series, or randomly as standalone novels

1. Gideon's Day *(Gideon of Scotland Yard) (1955)*
2. Seven Days to Death *(Gideon's Week) (1956)*
3. Gideon's Night *(1957)*
4. Gideon's Month *(1958)*
5. Gideon's Staff *(1959)*
6. Gideon's Risk *(1960)*
7. Gideon's Fire *(1961)*
8. A Conference for Assassins *(Gideon's March) (1962)*
9. Travelling Crimes *(Gideon's Ride) (1963)*
10. An Uncivilised Election *(Gideon's Vote) (1964)*
11. Criminal Imports *(Gideon's Lot) (1965)*
12. Gideon's Badge *(1966)*
13. From Murder to a Cathedral *(Gideon's Wrath) (1967)*
14. Gideon's River *(1968)*
15. Gideon's Power *(1969)*
16. Gideon's Sport *(1970)*
17. Gideon's Art *(1971)*
18. Gideon's Men *(1972)*
19. Gideon's Press *(1973)*
20. Gideon's Fog *(1975)*
21. Gideon's Drive *(1976)*
22. Vigilantes & Biscuits *(Gideon's Force) (1978)*

Other Series by John Creasey

Published or to be published by
House of Stratus

Dates given are those of first publication
Alternative titles in brackets

'Department 'Z" (28 titles)
'Dr. Palfrey Novels' (34 titles)
'Inspector West' (43 titles)
'Sexton Blake' (5 titles)
'The Baron' (47 titles) (writing as Anthony Morton)
'The Toff' (59 titles)

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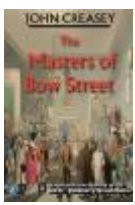

The Masters of Bow Street
This epic novel embraces the story of the Bow Street Runners and the Marine Police, forerunners of the modern police force, who were founded by novelist Henry Fielding in 1748. They were the earliest detective force operating from the courts to enforce the decisions of magistrates. John Creasey's account also gives a fascinating insight into family life of the time and the struggle between crime and justice, and ends with the establishment of the Metropolitan Police after the passing of Peel's Act in 1829.

'The Toff' Series

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1. Introducing the Toff *(It's the Toff!) (1938)*
2. The Toff Goes On *(1939)*
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4. Here Comes the Toff *(1940)*
5. The Toff Breaks In *(1940)*
6. Salute the Toff *(1941)*
7. The Toff Proceeds *(1941)*
8. The Toff Goes to Market *(1942)*
9. The Toff Is Back *(1942)*
10. The Toff on the Trail *(short stories) (1942)*
11. The Toff among the Millions *(1943)*
12. Accuse the Toff *(1943)*
13. The Toff and the Deadly Priest *(The Toff and the Curate) (1944)*
14. The Toff and the Great Illusion *(1944)*
15. Feathers for the Toff *(1945)*
16. The Toff and the Lady *(1946)*
17. Poison for the Toff *(The Toff on Ice) (1946)*
18. Hammer the Toff *(1947)*
19. The Toff in Town *(1948)*
20. The Toff Takes Shares *(1948)*
21. The Toff and Old Harry *(1949)*
22. The Toff on Board *(1949)*
23. Fool the Toff *(1950)*
24. Kill the Toff *(1950)*
25. A Knife for the Toff *(1951)*
26. A Mask for the Toff *(The Toff Goes Gay) (1951)*
27. Hunt the Toff *(1952)*
28. Call the Toff *(1953)*
29. The Toff Down Under *(Break the Toff) (1953)*
30. Murder Out of the Past *(short stories) (1953)*
31. The Toff at Camp *(The Toff at Butlins) (1954)*
32. The Toff at the Fair *(1954)*
33. A Six for the Toff *(A Score for the Toff) (1955)*
34. The Toff and the Deep Blue Sea *(1955)*
35. Kiss the Toff *(Make-Up for the Toff) (1956)*
36. The Toff in New York *(1956)*
37. Model for the Toff *(1957)*
38. The Toff on Fire *(1957)*
39. The Toff and the Stolen Tresses *(1958)*
40. Terror for the Toff *(The Toff on the Farm) (1958)*
41. Double for the Toff *(1959)*
42. The Toff and the Runaway Bride *(1959)*
43. A Rocket for the Toff *(1960)*
44. The Toff and the Kidnapped *(The Kidnapped Child) (1960)*
45. Follow the Toff *(1961)*
46. The Toff and the Toughs *(The Toff and the Teds) (1961)*
47. A Doll for the Toff *(1963)*
48. Leave It to the Toff *(1963)*
49. The Toff and the Spider *(1965)*

50. The Toff in Wax *(1966)*
51. A Bundle for the Toff *(1967)*
52. Stars for the Toff *(1968)*
53. The Toff and the Golden Boy *(1969)*
54. The Toff and the Fallen Angels *(1970)*
55. Vote for the Toff *(1971)*
56. The Toff and the Trip-Trip-Triplets *(1972)*
57. The Toff and the Terrified Taxman *(1973)*
58. The Toff and the Sleepy Cowboy *(1975)*
59. The Toff and the Crooked Copper *(1977)*

Inspector West Series

These Titles can be read as a series, or randomly as standalone novels

1. Inspector West Takes Charge *(1942)*
2. Go Away to Murder *(Inspector West Leaves Town) (1943)*
3. An Apostle of Gloom *(Inspector West At Home) (1944)*
4. Inspector West Regrets *(1945)*
5. Holiday for Inspector West *(1946)*
6. Battle for Inspector West *(1948)*
7. The Case Against Paul Raeburn *(Triumph for Inspector West) (1948)*
8. Inspector West Kicks Off *(Sport for Inspector West) (1949)*
9. Inspector West Alone *(1950)*
10. Inspector West Cries Wolf *(The Creepers) (1950)*
11. The Figure in the Dusk *(A Case for Inspector West) (1951)*
12. The Dissemblers *(Puzzle for Inspector West) (1951)*
13. The Case of the Acid Throwers *(The Blind Spot; Inspector West at Bay) (1952)*
14. Give a Man a Gun *(A Gun for Inspector West) (1953)*
15. Send Inspector West *(1953)*
16. So Young, So Cold, So Fair *(A Beauty for Inspector West; The Beauty Queen Killer) (1954)*
17. Murder Makes Haste *(Inspector West Makes Haste; The Gelignite Gang; Night of the Watchman) (1955)*
18. Murder: One, Two, Three *(Two for Inspector West) (1955)*
19. Death of a Postman *(Parcels for Inspector West) (1956)*
20. Death of an Assassin *(A Prince for Inspector West) (1956)*
21. Hit and Run *(Accident for Inspector West) (1957)*
22. The Trouble at Saxby's *(Find Inspector West; Doorway to Death) (1957)*
23. Murder, London - New York *(1958)*
24. Strike for Death *(The Killing Strike) (1958)*
25. Death of a Racehorse *(1959)*

26. The Case of the Innocent Victims *(1959)*
27. Murder on the Line *(1960)*
28. Death in Cold Print *(1961)*
29. The Scene of the Crime *(1961)*
30. Policeman's Dread *(1962)*
31. Hang the Little Man *(1963)*
32. Look Three Ways at Murder *(1964)*
33. Murder, London - Australia *(1965)*
34. Murder, London - South Africa *(1966)*
35. The Executioners *(1967)*
36. So Young to Burn *(1968)*
37. Murder, London - Miami *(1969)*
38. A Part for a Policeman *(1970)*
39. Alibi for Inspector West *(1971)*
40. A Splinter of Glass *(1972)*
41. The Theft of Magna Carta *(1973)*
42. The Extortioners *(1974)*
43. A Sharp Rise in Crime *(1978)*

'The Baron' Series

These Titles can be read as a series, or randomly as standalone novels

1. Meet the Baron *(The Man in the Blue Mask) (1937)*
2. The Baron Returns *(The Return of the Blue Mask) (1937)*
3. The Baron Again *(Salute Blue Mask) (1938)*
4. The Baron at Bay *(Blue Mask at Bay) (1938)*
5. Alias the Baron *(Alias Blue Mask) (1939)*
6. The Baron at Large *(Challenge Blue Mask!) (1939)*
7. Versus the Baron *(Blue Mask Strikes Again) (1940)*
8. Call for the Baron *(Blue Mask Victorious) (1940)*
9. The Baron Comes Back *(1943)*
10. A Case for the Baron *(1945)*
11. Reward for the Baron *(1945)*
12. Career for the Baron *(1946)*
13. The Baron and the Beggar *(1947)*
14. Blame the Baron *(1948)*
15. A Rope for the Baron *(1948)*
16. Books for the Baron *(1949)*
17. Cry for the Baron *(1950)*
18. Trap the Baron *(1950)*
19. Attack the Baron *(1951)*
20. Shadow the Baron *(1951)*
21. Warn the Baron *(1952)*

22. The Baron Goes East *(1953)*
23. The Baron in France *(1953)*
24. Danger for the Baron *(1953)*
25. The Baron Goes Fast *(1954)*
26. Nest-Egg for the Baron *(Deaf, Dumb and Blonde) (1954)*
27. Help from the Baron *(1955)*
28. Hide the Baron *(1956)*
29. The Double Frame *(Frame the Baron) (1957)*
30. Blood Red *(Red Eye for the Baron) (1958)*
31. If Anything Happens to Hester *(Black for the Baron) (1959)*
32. Salute for the Baron *(1960)*
33. The Baron Branches Out *(A Branch for the Baron) (1961)*
34. The Baron and the Stolen Legacy *(Bad for the Baron) (1962)*
35. A Sword for the Baron *(The Baron and the Mogul Swords) (1963)*
36. The Baron on Board *(1964)*
37. The Baron and the Chinese Puzzle *(1964)*
38. Sport for the Baron *(1966)*
39. Affair for the Baron *(1967)*
40. The Baron and the Missing Old Masters *(1968)*
41. The Baron and the Unfinished Portrait *(1969)*
42. Last Laugh for the Baron *(1970)*
43. The Baron Goes A-Buying *(1971)*
44. The Baron and the Arrogant Artist *(1972)*
45. Burgle the Baron *(1973)*
46. The Baron - King Maker *(1975)*
47. Love for the Baron *(1979)*

Doctor Palfrey Novels

These Titles can be read as a series, or randomly as standalone novels

1. Traitor's Doom *(1942)*
2. The Legion of the Lost *(1943)*
3. The Valley of Fear *(The Perilous Country) (1943)*
4. Dangerous Quest *(1944)*
5. Death in the Rising Sun *(1945)*
6. The Hounds of Vengeance *(1945)*
7. Shadow of Doom *(1946)*
8. The House of the Bears *(1946)*
9. Dark Harvest *(1947)*
10. The Wings of Peace *(1948)*
11. The Sons of Satan *(1948)*
12. The Dawn of Darkness *(1949)*
13. The League of Light *(1949)*

14. The Man Who Shook the World *(1950)*
15. The Prophet of Fire *(1951)*
16. The Children of Hate *(The Killers of Innocence; The Children of Despair) (1952)*
17. The Touch of Death *(1954)*
18. The Mists of Fear *(1955)*
19. The Flood *(1956)*
20. The Plague of Silence *(1958)*
21. Dry Spell *(The Drought) (1959)*
22. The Terror *(1962)*
23. The Depths *(1963)*
24. The Sleep *(1964)*
25. The Inferno *(1965)*
26. The Famine *(1967)*
27. The Blight *(1968)*
28. The Oasis *(1970)*
29. The Smog *(1970)*
30. The Unbegotten *(1971)*
31. The Insulators *(1972)*
32. The Voiceless Ones *(1973)*
33. The Thunder-Maker *(1976)*
34. The Whirlwind *(1979)*

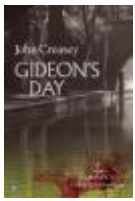
'Department Z' Novels

These Titles can be read as a series, or randomly as standalone novels

1. The Death Miser *(1932)*
2. Redhead *(1934)*
3. First Came a Murder *(1934)*
4. Death Round the Corner *(1935)*
5. The Mark of the Crescent *(1935)*
6. Thunder in Europe *(1936)*
7. The Terror Trap *(1936)*
8. Carriers of Death *(1937)*
9. Days of Danger *(1937)*
10. Death Stands By *(1938)*
11. Menace! *(1938)*
12. Murder Must Wait *(1939)*
13. Panic! *(1939)*
14. Death by Night *(1940)*
15. The Island of Peril *(1940)*
16. Sabotage *(1941)*
17. Go Away Death *(1941)*

18. The Day of Disaster *(1942)*
19. Prepare for Action *(1942)*
20. No Darker Crime *(1943)*
21. Dark Peril *(1944)*
22. The Peril Ahead *(1946)*
23. The League of Dark Men *(1947)*
24. The Department of Death *(1949)*
25. The Enemy Within *(1950)*
26. Dead or Alive *(1951)*
27. A Kind of Prisoner *(1954)*
28. The Black Spiders *(1957)*

Select Synopses

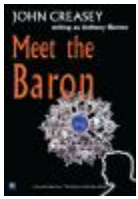


Gideon's Day
Gideon's day is a busy one. He balances family commitments with solving a series of seemingly unrelated crimes from which a plot nonetheless evolves and a mystery is solved. One of the most senior officers within Scotland Yard, George Gideon's crime solving abilities are in the finest traditions of London's world famous police headquarters. His analytical brain and sense of fairness is respected by colleagues and villains alike.

Gideon's Night
On this particular night Commander George Gideon has to deal with a couple of psychopaths who trail pain and blood in their wake. One targets infants, and the other young women on London's foggy streets. There's also an explosive gang war in the offing, and one way or another all of these cases are coming to their breathtaking conclusions at the same time. Can Scotland Yard's finest cope with such a nightmarish scenario, with what would ordinarily be months of time consuming police work crammed into just one night?

Gideon's Fire
Commander George Gideon of Scotland Yard has to deal successively with news of a mass murderer, a depraved maniac, and the deaths of a family in an arson attack on an old building south of the river. This leaves little time for the crisis developing at home . . .

Meet the Baron
John Mannering (*The Baron*) makes

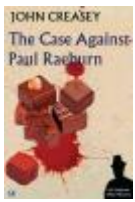


his first appearance in this volume. Lord Fauntley cannot help showing off both his daughter and the security under which his precious jewels are kept. Mannering finds himself attracted to both .... Money is tight and so he plans a burglary, but this fails and unexpected consequnces result. The relationship with Lorna Fauntley flourishes, and a series of high profile thefts and adventures ensure Mannering's future, so he believes, until Lorna equates him with *The Baron*. One of the many further twists in this award winning novel occurs when the police appear to seek Mannering's help, only to have everything turned upside down as the plot develops . . .

Shadow The Baron
John Mannering ('*The Baron*') is called in by Scorland Yard's Superintendent Bristow to help catch the mysterious jewel thief '*The Shadow*'. No one know the thief's identity, but he has managed to pull off many high profile robberies. However, as Mannering proceeds to track down the target, he finds the pursuer becomes the pursued . . . ..

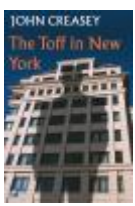
The House of the Bears
Standing alone in the bleak Yorkshire Moors is Sir Rufus Marne's *'House of the Bears'*. Dr. Palfrey is asked to journey there to examine an invalid - whom he finds has disappeared. Moreover, Marne's daughter lies terribly injured after a fall from the minstrel's gallery, which Dr. Palfrey discovers was no accident. He sets out to look into both matters, but the discoveries he makes are truly fantastic. A deserted mine, powerful explosive and a submarine all feature in this powerful mystery. The results are even capable of surprising him ...

Inspector West Takes Charge
Extortion is the name of the game, as one victim after another is ruthlessly targeted. Chief Inspector Roger West must now solve the problem, along with a tangle of murders - but the case becomes more frightening as every minute passes.



The Case Against Paul Raeburn
Chief Inspector Roger West has been watching and waiting for over two years - he is determined to catch Paul Raeburn out. The millionaire racketeer may have made a mistake, following the killing of a small time crook. Can the ace detective triumph over the evil Raeburn in what are very difficult circumstances? This cannot be assumed as not eveything, it would seem, is as simple as it first appears .....

Introducing The Toff
The Toff is the Hon. Richard Rollison; the ultimate sleuth who revels in solving crimes. Whilst returning home across the Essex countryside from a day's cricket at his father's Norfolk home, he happens upon an accident that sets him on a new trail. This involves murder, suspense and thrilling action as The Toff applies his mind with its usual precision and thoroughness.



The Toff in New York
'Say, Miss Hall, I hope that brother of yours hasn't run into any trouble.' But Will Hall had been kidnapped and the Honourable Richard Rollison, known by many by the apt if absurd soubriquet of the *'Toff'* is soon on the scene, but not before a murdered man had fallen into Valerie Hallís arms. There's lots of action in 'millionaire surroundings', with a rich private eye

and the NYPD all on the case, whilst the Toff tracks Dutch Himmy, surely the worst man in New York . . . ..

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